



Heard, Not Judged:

INSIGHTS INTO THE

TALENTS, REALITIES AND NEEDS

OF YOUNG MEN OF COLOR



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Report Sections	Page
Preface_____	3
Project Overview_____	4
Executive Summary_____	7
Full (Detailed Written Narratives)_____	13
Focus Group Video Profiles_____	25
Research Methodology_____	26
Appendix_____	
• Appendix A: African-American Focus Group Summaries_____	28
• Appendix B: Latino Focus Group Summaries_____	63
• Appendix C: Analysis of the Pre-Focus Group Surveys_____	74
• Appendix D: Infographics of the African-American Pre-Focus Group Survey Results_____	83
• Appendix E: Links to the Focus Group Video Library_____	87

A portrait of Frederick Douglass, an older man with a full white beard and long white hair, wearing a dark suit and a white shirt with a dark tie. The image is tinted with a blue color.

**“I AM FOR THE ‘IMMEDIATE, UNCONDITIONAL,
AND UNIVERSAL’ ENFRANCHISEMENT OF THE
BLACK MAN, IN EVERY STATE IN THE UNION”**
FREDERICK DOUGLASS, 1865

PHOTO: George Kendall Warren [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

A portrait of Cesar Chavez, a man with dark hair and a mustache, wearing a light-colored shirt. The image is tinted with a red color.

**“PRESERVATION OF ONE’S OWN CULTURE
DOES NOT REQUIRE CONTEMPT OR
DISRESPECT FOR OTHER CULTURES”**
CESAR CHAVEZ

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COVER PHOTO: Courtesy of All-Star Code

PREFACE

This research team prides itself on the ability to communicate with young people. Since MEE’s first national research project, “Reaching the Hip-Hop Generation” (1992), we have been listening to people who are too often overlooked and underserved. We know how to gain access to the hardest-to-reach, and how to get to the bottom of often-complex behaviors and motivations. Part of the answer is that we go directly into the community to recruit and meet with our subjects, then we encourage them to speak in their language and style, in a way that makes them comfortable in taking on and talking about the most sensitive issues in their lives.

For this project, it was important to understand just how boys and men of color¹ define success, from their perspective and worldview. Young men of African and Hispanic descent opened up to us about their lives — and we heard their needs, dreams and everyday challenges; we listened to their recommendations and ideas for potential solutions, i.e., what they think would work, to give them real access to jobs, education, mentoring, healthcare — to equal opportunity. Then we collectively spent months thinking about, coding and analyzing what they said.

As a socially responsible company, we don’t do “top down” public health communications or behavior change campaigns. We would rather explore beneath the surface of what we think we know about an audience we are trying to reach and influence, understand their worldview and involved them in our “by and for” process to developing recommendations and solutions. We are excited about this newest opportunity to share our community-based participatory research, a chance to add young men of color’s voices to the dialogue kindled by national attention to their plight, with the My Brother’s Keeper Initiative, the Campaign for Black Male Achievement, The California Endowment’s “Sons and Brothers” Campaign and other enterprises. This research provides another window into their world.

¹ The descriptor “boys and men of color” covers a broad (and growing) range of America’s population. This research concentrated on a subset of this group — young African-American males, a key sub-population of BMOC. We also included two focus groups with California-based Latino males.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This research project was funded by the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and The California Endowment (TCE) and was undertaken in: New York, Baltimore, Atlanta, New Orleans, Detroit, Oakland, Los Angeles and Long Beach. Male research subjects ranged in age from 18 to 24 and were of African and Hispanic descent. The research team gathered insights about the dreams, challenges and needs of boys and young men of color (BMOC) in America. The research team wanted to hear directly from young men of color about what they needed (content) and how they needed it (delivered) in order to make better, healthier daily decisions, in spite of their significant challenges.

In order to ensure that participating youth were from urban neighborhoods in the lowest quintile of the U.S. population for income, MEE recruited participants from Census Tracts that over-indexed in African American and Hispanic populations and had average yearly household incomes under \$40k. The MEE Project Team conducted a series of videotaped focus groups in addition to conducting brief individual interviews with a sub-set of the focus group participants before and after the focus group sessions. All focus group participants completed a written demographic, beliefs and media-consumption survey prior to the focus group.

The aims/objectives of the original proposed audience research were two-fold. First, we needed to understand the unmet needs of boys and men of color in America, along with their daily realities, their aspirations and the challenges that prevent them from achieving them. We also wanted to hear their proposed solutions for meeting their needs, including how digital technology could help level the playing field and help BMOC make better, healthier daily decisions, in spite of obstacles.

The focus group schedule was as follows:

Group	City	Date	Ethnicity	Partner
Trial	Philadelphia	February 2015	African American	TCE
1	Oakland/Richmond	February 2015	African American	TCE
2	Oakland/Richmond	February 2015	African American	TCE
3	Los Angeles	February 2015	Latino	TCE
4	Long Beach	February 2015	Latino	TCE
5	New York City	April 2015	African American	OSF
6	Baltimore	April 2015	African American	OSF
7	Atlanta	May 2015	African American	OSF
8	New Orleans	May 2015	African American	OSF
9	Detroit	May 2015	African American	OSF

The focus group research was comprehensively coded and analyzed (via a combination of written notes and videotapes) using MEE's extensive multi-level process. All focus groups were thoroughly summarized, coded and analyzed in search of consistent themes emerging from the respondents. Coders, researchers and the video editor carefully identified themes and sub-themes that were used in later analysis to draw conclusions, including comparisons across groups. What follows are the full, detailed written narratives based on the data collected and analyzed and the research methodology used to uncover them.

The research team asked deep, probing questions that allowed BMOC to define themselves, rather than being the subject of assumptions, mischaracterizations and downright untruths. The written narrative, which is based on those questions and excerpted in the Executive Summary that begins on page 6, is divided into four sections:

- **Values:** This section explores the personal values of low-income, urban African-American males and the obstacles they face (real or perceived).
 - What Do African-American Males Value?
 - How Do African-American Males Form Their Value System?
 - What Role Does Spirituality Play in the Lives of African-American Males?
 - What Obstacles (Real or Perceived) Do BMOC Face to Living Out Their Values on a Daily Basis?
- **Success and Optimal Health:** This section aims to understand how African-American males define success, optimal health (physical, emotional, mental, etc.), and understand what they need in order to thrive, rather than merely survive.
 - What's the Difference Between Surviving and Thriving?
 - How Do African-American Males Define Success?
 - Which Successful People are BMOC Exposed to in Their Lives?
 - What Do African-American Males Need in Order to be Successful?
 - How Important is the Concept of Respect for African-American Males?
 - What Does Optimal Health Look and Feel Like for African-American Males?
- **Competition/Winning/Success:** This section aims to understand how African-American males define and value competition. We also asked them to discuss their opportunities to pursue the “American Dream,” relative to mainstream populations. They talked about their personal talents and abilities and how those helped them compete in life.
 - Why Do African-American Males Think of Life as a Competition?
 - Does “America’s Promise” Extend to African-American Males?
 - Which Creative Talents of African-American Males Can Best Help Them Compete in Life?
 - How Can African-American Males Hone and Enhance Their Skills and Talents to Be at the Top of Their Game?
- **Existing Resources for African-American Males:** African-American males discussed the quantity and quality of resources available to them, both via online/digital tools and in their respective home communities.
 - Which Community-based Resources Would African-American Males Trust to Help Them Be Successful?
 - How Can Providers Change Their Programs and Outreach to Better Serve African-American Males?
 - What Online Resources Do African-American Males Find Relevant and Useful?
 - What Kind of Mobile Apps Do African-American Males Want?

In addition to the written narrative, the research team is providing access to all of the data collected before and during the focus groups. Included in this document are the following:

- **Video Profiles:** Video profiles, organized by the themes and sections outlined above, were created using clips of representative comments from focus group participants. The profiles highlight the most salient quotes across groups and provide a look into the lives of BMOC, hearing their perspectives in their own voices.
- **Research Methodology:** MEE’s audience research methodology includes research design and moderator’s guide development; participant recruitment and screening; the trial focus group to test the research design; videotaped data collection and focus group moderation; and, the last step, data coding, analysis and reporting.

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- **Written Summaries of Each African-American Focus Group:** Summaries of the participants' responses from each focus group (Appendix A).
 - **Written Summaries of Each Latino Focus Group:** Summaries of the participants' responses from each focus group (Appendix B).
 - **Results and Infographics from the Pre-Focus Group Surveys:** Results and Infographics from the pre-focus group surveys each participant completed (Appendices C & D).
 - **Links to Raw Videos:** Links to the various focus group video footage (Appendix E).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION: A UNIQUE WAY TO ADDRESS THE UNMET NEEDS OF BMOC

Through listening to their voices, we learned that boys and young men of color (BMOC) have immense talent, love of family, a belief in self, yearning for skill development, education and opportunity to elevate themselves, their families and their communities. BMOC are willing, ready to hustle and able to climb the ladder of success. (See the “Key Findings” section on page 8 for details from national research with this population.)

Challenging these admirable attributes and values, however, are distinct inhibitors. BMOC are extremely stressed out, taken off task by distractions and temptation, don’t believe in the American Dream and can barely see beyond surviving. They feel trapped at the bottom of the ladder because of a lack of resources, negative peer pressure and racism. They are afraid to fail and lack awareness and trust of resources currently available to help them.

It is clear from this research that we must deliver information differently in order to help BMOC make better, healthier daily decisions, in spite of their significant challenges. Like other Americans, they deserve to lead a life of success and significance. Yet, people of color have always had to be “twice as good” in order to compete and win. To get there, millennial boys and men of color need actionable information, resources and access to opportunities. Our national audience research confirmed that BMOC have the motivation; if the game of success is going to be fair, every player must have an equal chance.

How do we meet the needs boys and men of color described in this research? How do we blaze a clear path to success for BMOC? And how can we leverage the latest digital technology to help us deliver the resources needed to achieve it? These are among the questions explored in the research. What we found is that creative use of mobile digital devices could be an effective tool to help boys and men of color overcome adversity and achieve their goals.

BMOC need on-demand, frequent (24-hour) access to trusted online resources, along with in-person services that can close opportunity gaps and level the playing field. They need connection to resources that will help them identify, hone and perfect their inherent skills and talents. They need trauma-informed programming that combines both mental wellness and skills development components (the same talents can both help them cope in the short-term and provide a path to meaningful work and careers over time). They need committed mentors and authentic messaging that speak the language that reflects their reality. And, finally, they need a support system to aid them and help them “get back up” when they inevitably slip, as we all do.

Ironically, what we found is that many of the stated needs of BMOC are available — somewhere, at some times. For example, there are both local and national mentoring programs in most communities. In addition, there are online classified ads for jobs. There are universities with online applications and study programs. There are organizations dedicated to helping those in need secure medical care.

However, there are two critical, missing ingredients that preclude BMOC from accessing these and other available resources — one is trust, the other is effective branding. For trust, BMOC are known to respond to trusted community (personal and face-to-face) resources. In many cases, the messenger is often more important than the message itself. At the moment, however, BMOC do not trust many providers of the available resources, because they don’t really know the “people behind the services.” Most providers, whether online or in the community, are not seen as credible or culturally relevant. For example, many mentoring resources may go unused because BMOC don’t know or trust the organizations that offer them. BMOC forge personal connections with those they come to believe truly care about them.

We also know that BMOC respond to branding in the consumer and entertainment spheres. They have been critical to the success of culturally-specific global entertainment-based brands such as Nike, Apple and Beats by Dre. Can the same type of branding used by these industry giants be used to aggressively market pro-social behaviors and self-development? We know of no agencies or programs that have tried it. The project’s hypothesis was that a

brand-driven, private-sector approach could help BMOC make better-informed daily decisions and help them identify and quickly act on opportunities (“real-time”) for improving their lives.

PROJECT AIMS AND HYPOTHESIS

The aims/objectives of the original proposed audience research were two-fold. First, we needed to understand the unmet needs of boys and men of color in America, along with their daily realities, their aspirations and the challenges that prevent them from achieving them. We have always use a “by and for” process in getting to solutions for tough social or public health issues. So we went directly to boys and men of color in nine (9) American cities to listen to and hear from them, to get their perspectives. The second focus of the research was to explore the viability of using a branded digital tool and associated offline resources to reach, engage and retain BMOC, connecting them to a diverse range of community touch-points and services mobilized to develop their skills and talents. We wanted to know whether a brand-driven, private sector approach using the technology that Millennials embrace could work just as well as traditional, public sector approaches in erasing disparities that have put young men of color at a competitive disadvantage.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This research project was co-funded by The California Endowment (TCE) and the Campaign for Black Male Achievement of the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and was undertaken in nine (9) cities across the United States. Research subjects ranged in age from 18 to 24 and were of African and Hispanic descent. MEE gathered African-American and Latino male consumer insights about our concept for a branded digital platform for BMOC. We tested the brand architecture (i.e., key features, functional and emotional benefits) to determine how it resonates with BMOC across the country. We explored whether access to digital tools could help young men of color reach their full potential. This research project indicates a resounding, albeit nuanced, yes.

While our focus was on using a digital platform to achieve scale in reaching meaningful numbers of BMOC daily, it was abundantly clear from the research that face-to-face interactions with community-based mentors would also be needed to provide the structure and guidance to overcome life’s challenges. The need for a dual-track strategy was clear. Ongoing (digital) access to the right information, and right opportunities, in conjunction with the occasional (personal) access to people who care is potent. This audience research supports (and the analysis confirmed) the need for a two-pronged strategy to aid BMOC skill and life development, while also teaching them how to positively cope with their environmental context (social determinants).

The focus groups were thoroughly summarized, coded and analyzed in search of consistent meta-themes emerging from the respondents. Our research showed that BMOC need trusted resources that break through external and internal (mental) roadblocks – by enhancing their skills and talents in order to compete in the global economy while they overcome life’s daily challenges. A branded digital platform (with referrals/access to offline resources) can be that resource. What follows is a summary of the identified themes and the research methodology used to uncover them. We also provide a number of “next steps” recommendations, including possible counter-narratives that lead toward solutions to many of the life challenges and lifestyle issues raised.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research team designed and developed the appropriate data-collection instruments (recruitment communications, screener, pre-focus group surveys and moderator guides) to ensure cultural relevance. In order to ensure that participating young adults were from urban neighborhoods in the lowest quintile of the U.S. population for income, MEE recruited participants from Census Tracts that over-indexed in African American and Hispanic populations and had average yearly household incomes under \$40k. MEE conducted a series of videotaped focus groups in the cities listed in the table below. The MEE Project Team also conducted brief individual interviews with a sub-set of the focus group participants before and after the focus group sessions. All focus group participants also completed a written demographic, beliefs and media-consumption survey prior to the focus group.

The focus group research was comprehensively coded (via a combination of written notes and review of more than 20 hours of raw video footage) and analyzed using MEE's extensive multi-level process. It began with writing content summaries for each group. Coders, researchers and the video editor carefully identified themes and sub-themes that were used in later analysis to draw conclusions, including comparisons across groups.

KEY FINDINGS (THEMES)

Family Values

BMOC possess a deep love and reverence for their family, most notably for the matriarch. Nearly all acknowledge the strength and fortitude of their mothers and other women in their lives, thereby serving as a source of inspiration. These young men also admirably carry the responsibility and concern for the well-being of their younger siblings. This did not surprise us. However, the level of intensity and willingness to publicly acknowledge their love for their families was of note. One might say that BMOC live and die for their families...figuratively, and in some cases, literally.

"Family, that's yours. No one can take it from you. Your grandma is your grandma, so I feel like that's the only thing people can't take from you."

In addition, the overall concept of family transcends blood relatives for BMOC. A good, close friend holds a familial, loving place in the hearts of BMOC. In some cases, these friends play a dichotomous role in the lives of BMOC. They are at once trusted allies in times of need, while also being the source of potentially debilitating distractions.

"I'd jump in front of a bullet for them [some of my friends]. I've got friends that I've known since I came out of the hospital. Grew up with, went to school, did everything with. No doubt, they are probably more family than my actual blood."

Education as a Way Up and Out

To a man, all BMOC both understand and respect the role that education plays in potentially transforming their lives and the lives of others. This was true even among those who had dropped out of high school. BMOC are lucid about the life-altering value of education (both formal and informal), but don't always know how to access and put it into practice for themselves.

"You come out, there's no work place to put your degree to use...I talk a lot about education and how important that is, but at the same time let's be realistic. Can it really help?"

Thriving: Just a Little Better Than Surviving

Walking into the research, we anticipated that BMOC would leap at the chance to describe what their nirvana station in life would look like. We thought perhaps we'd hear about their dreams of multiple homes, luxury cars, millionaire status or beyond. However, we heard little of that. Rather, the BMOC idea of thriving is not lofty — in fact, it is only incrementally better than surviving. It seems, because of the energy it takes to deal with day-to-day struggles, that BMOC don't look far enough into the future to see what thriving really could be. More specifically, "thriving" consists of NOT living check to check, having a home for self and family, having health care, and so on. These young men were far more interested in caring for their family's urgent needs and less interested in the heavily media-propagated material symbols of success. It's not that they don't want the finer things, but they feel that the deck is stacked against them. Failures and roadblocks have created skepticism that the "good life" is a reality for most BMOC.

"Thriving is you being successful, being able to take care of yourself, maybe your kids, too, if you have them, your loved one and possibly be able to take care of your parents or help out others with your money and your time."

Beginning to Look at Health Holistically

While BMOC primarily defined optimal health in terms of physical components, a few participants in each group mentioned health as not only physical, but also emotional and psychological. Many BMOC described the stress they carry in worrying about themselves and their families. Unfortunately, they often self-medicate to manage this acute stress; they don't have access to and/or knowledge of viable alternatives. However, it was refreshing to hear young men talk in front of their peers, without fear of judgment, about the need to be emotionally and mentally healthy.

"You don't have to be the healthiest person physically, but you should strive to be. You should strive to be as healthy as your body will allow you. And you also need to know how to keep your head right, keep your mind straight, keep your mind healthy, be able to make healthy relationships."

More Stressed Than We Thought

We knew BMOC, like many underserved populations in America, were experiencing trauma and living under high levels of stress. However, we underestimated its intensity. The stress BMOC endure and attempt to manage is multifaceted. As mentioned earlier, they worry about their families and desperately try to help. For example, they worry about their siblings and want them *not* to experience some of the stressors they face. They worry about themselves and their futures. They do a lot of worrying. And this should worry us.

"I always worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow's not a promise. I could do something today that could prevent me from doing anything that I want to do tomorrow. Or, just my surroundings. Or I could say the wrong thing, be at the wrong place at the wrong time, and that could be that, ya know?"

"Waking up in the morning, I worry about, like, what's going to happen today? Who am I going to lose today, or am I gonna get locked up today? Different things, like just getting dressed and walking out the house before the day starts."

Religion vs. Spirituality vs. Belief in Self

By and large, the BMOC "belief" construct flows in this order: first, belief in self, followed by belief in a higher power/spirit and finally, belief in practicing a formal religion. Overwhelmingly, BMOC said that they were spiritual, but expressed concern that belief in a "religion" often implies a constraining doctrine. Very few BMOC shared benefits associated with being connected to a religious institution.

"I'm more of a 'show me' kind of person, and when you talk about religion, I feel like religion is very convenient for a lot of people, and a lot of people fit religion to what they need. And that's something that's for certain individuals, but it's not for me as an individual. I feel like I can get by doing things my own way, instead of having this belief that there's somebody somewhere pulling strings that we can't see. Those sort of things don't really appeal to me."

Untapped Talents and Lack of Formal Skills Development

BMOC believe in themselves, in spite of their worry and real/perceived obstacles. Under the circumstances, this is remarkable. Many know they have unique talents and abilities, and want to perfect their craft. Yet, they don't know how to access the people (such as mentors), places or resources required to develop them. This is a frustrating conundrum for BMOC. They are acutely aware that one can recognize his gift in graphic design or photography, for example, but without a computer or camera to work his craft, he's at a decided disadvantage. It's important to note that there was often a direct correlation between educational success and the presence of a mentor. Sadly, it appears not enough BMOC find positive, nonjudgmental mentors in their lives.

"Creativeness is the ability to bring forth, whether it's a material, an idea, a movement or anything like that. It comes from within, and your ability to bring it forth. Talent is the ability to harbor that ability to bring forth. Your talent is what makes you skilled in that ability to bring something forth, your creativeness."

"I'm into graphic design, but I can't do that if I don't have a computer or a place to practice my work."

Putting in the Work

BMOC are not in search of a handout, but they are in need of a hand *up*. They do not have the “welfare mentality” that the media would lead many to believe. Instead, they want to put in the work needed in order to make it; they are ready to grind. The word “hustle” has two formal definitions (Merriam-Webster), one negative and one positive. The negative definition is to sell something to or obtain something from someone by energetic and especially underhanded activity <*hustling* the suckers>. The positive definition is to obtain or gain through only energetic activity <*hustle* up new customers>. Our research indicated BMOC were clearly focused on the latter of the two definitions. They provided multiple examples of their current attempts to hustle and work hard as a means to elevate themselves and assist their loved ones (financially and otherwise). Regrettably, most don’t know how to make their hustle pay off. This is both a problem and an opportunity that needs proactive attention.

“Motivation and hard work throughout a lifetime lead you to success, but sometimes there are just not those opportunities...there are some things that unfortunately, we can’t control or you yourself can’t control.”

Competition Is a Reality, but Zero-Sum Leaves BMOC at a Disadvantage

BMOC fully recognize that life is a competition. In their view, the game of life leads to competition that frequently results in heavy, repeated BMOC losses and disadvantages (jobs, education, social perception, etc.). Obviously, they don’t like that competition, in pursuit of the American Dream, seemingly always leads to negative outcomes for boys and men of color.

“Life in America is a competition. This country is a giant business; it’s a well-oiled machine. In this country, especially with capitalism, the point is to step on whoever’s neck you’ve got to in order to get ahead. There is no such thing as free lunch. Everything that you got costs somebody else. Our people, we’re behind everybody. Everybody got a 4-mile head start and we gotta sprint, just to catch up. So I’d say over here, in America, it is a competition.”

“You’re going for that job, there’s other people going for that job. It’s a competition to get that job.”

American Dream? BMOC Need Not Apply

BMOC are keenly aware of the American Dream — they just don’t believe it applies to them. They are not buying what America is “selling.” Sure, they believe they can make it in America. But they aren’t buying into the dream lock, stock and barrel. Far too often, the lack of access to the resources and opportunities needed to achieve the American Dream has instead become their nightmare.

“I think we don’t get respect at all. I think they kind of try to watch us to see what our next move is...like an animal in a cage. Because we’ve been stereotyped and branded and don’t get the respect of actually being human beings, and being of the same country.”

Procrastination and Willpower

Among the distractions noted as inhibitors to living the values most important to BMOC, procrastination was most pervasive. BMOC were honest enough to admit that they don’t always “do what they know they should” to improve themselves and their life circumstances. On the surface, this attention-catching admission conflicted with the BMOC stated and inferred desire to hustle in order to elevate their circumstances. Curious, we dug deeper into this apparent conflict between motivation (hustle) and procrastination (the absence of hustle). We discovered a groundbreaking 1998 study by psychologist Roy Baumeister using chocolate and radishes to examine willpower and self-control. The study concluded that self-control, much like a muscle, can be depleted. BMOC who resist and navigate a bevy of daily struggles (the environment that they see out their windows, temptations in their communities, no access to resources and the constant distractions of negative peer pressure) simply deplete their supply of willpower that could be applied to making their lives better. They find themselves unable to complete important tasks such as studying, filling out a job application, practicing a craft, etc. We believe this depletion to be the source of much of their procrastination.

“One of my values was ‘drive to succeed.’ If you’re not driven to succeed and you’re procrastinating, that’s blocking a value. You can’t get anywhere if you’re not driven to do it.”

“Just walk outside, it’s a lot of drug activity. That’s bad influence that can stop somebody right there from doing what they need to do. Just the community, looking out the window, it’s hard growing up in a place like this. It ain’t too much motivation.”

Fear of Failure?

How is it that a group of young men who believe in themselves and work to overcome major obstacles and distractions also fear failure? Put another way, how is it that those with seemingly little to lose and everything to gain could be afraid to fail? According to BMOC, it’s because they are far too often painfully disappointed with *not* getting the job, *not* getting into school, *not* succeeding. Therefore, at the darkest moments, some BMOC think “somebody else wins and we lose, no matter how hard we try. So why keep trying? While not validated with research, we concluded that it’s vital to provide trusted resources to BMOC as early in life as possible. Otherwise, the burden of failure accumulates over time and eventually extinguishes the desire to try.

“For me, it’s the fear of failure. I try to do things I know I can do, or know I can get. I don’t wanna do something and get let down. I’m tired of being let down. Like, if I know I’m qualified for a certain job, I would go for that job. I wouldn’t try to reach beyond that job, because I don’t want to be let down at the end and not get it. A lot of times, constant disappointments can make you not wanna try no more.”

SUMMARY

A compelling and culturally relevant digital platform that offers BMOC great services, tools and knowledge, from people they can trust, can provide the missing ingredients uncovered by this research. We believe this branded-platform’s strategies will be best executed through a combination of technology (online) for scale and human-ology (offline) for impact.

By combining the breadth of resources available via digital tools (online) with in-person human contact and support (offline), BMOC can access trusted and relevant programming that builds coping skills, develops innate talents and provides a roadmap to the success they want for themselves and their families.

BMOC need trusted resources, both in person and via their smartphone, tablet or other mobile device, to enhance their ability to play “the game of life” and overcome its challenges. Future funding should concentrate on programs and services that understand and reflect the dual-pronged nature (i.e., rights of passage/mental health and talent/skills development) of BMOC’s most urgent needs. Those that provide “one-stop shopping” for young men of color will have the highest return on investment.

NARRATIVE BASED ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS

Findings and Recommendations Based on Focus Group Summaries

Profiles of African-American Males Oakland; New York City; Baltimore; Atlanta; New Orleans; Detroit The Open Society Foundations

Dates: **February 23rd and 24th; April 7th and 9th; May 6th, 7th and 12th**
 Ethnicity: **African American**
 Participants: **35 Participants (Average Age: 21 years-old)**

Values

This section aimed to better understand the values of low-income urban African-American males and the obstacles they face...real or perceived.

What Do African-American Males Value?

African-American males value their families. A youth from Oakland commented, *"Family, that's yours, no one can take it from you, your grandma is your grandma so I feel like that's the only thing people can't take from you..."* (01:07:48)

Although immediate family (mother, sister, aunts, grandmothers) is very important, the definition of family extends beyond the nuclear unit, or even blood connections. It also is based on the role a person plays in an African-American males' life – someone who they can trust and depend on (whose got their back), no matter what. A participant in Atlanta explained, *"Well, when I say family, I look at it like, through bloodline, and as far as the relationship I have with the person because, you don't even have to be my blood family but you can still be my family. It's all about how much respect you've got for that person, and how much they've got for you."* (01:06:12) A participant in New Orleans explained how he had a friend he considered family. He stated, *"I got a friend but he got killed, I looked at him as a brother, he was my friend since we was 7 or 8 years old. His mom and his little brother, I look at them like family. I call her 'Mom' too and I call his little brother, 'brother.'" (01:08:30)*

For some African-American males, having money, being financially successful or having a job or career that provides financial means was listed as an important value. A youth in Oakland stated, *"Money is important 'cause that's what society is built around so without money you can't do anything, so you're going to have to get it regardless."* (01:07:14) Another continued, *"I just want to live big, period. I dream big and I have big expectations for myself so money is almost everything to me."* (01:07:25) Another Oakland participant added, *"I mean who don't love money? Who don't want money in their pocket? Who wants to walk around broke? You know so that's just how I look at it, I don't ever want to be broke."* (01:08:33) An interesting question is whether money is in fact a value or a means to get to one? Clearly, they "value" money and the respect, consumption and ease it can bring (as a resource).

Where African-American Males Get Their Values

Women [see immediate family members mentioned above] play an important role in the lives of African-American males. They powerfully contribute to values transfer, whether by direct conversation or by being role models of a path to success. One Oakland participant summed up how the women in his life influenced him, *"The women pretty much in my life made up the values in me."* (01:09:53) Another Oakland participant explained, *"I feel like I get a lot of my values from a lot of the women I've met or talked to in my life because I feel like men in general get a lot of their game from their women...women tend to think outside of the box."* (01:09:26) A Detroit participant added, *"I would say my grandmother more than anyone, even more than my parents. My father, he wasn't so supportive. He's been in and out and it's been like that for years now. My Mom, we really don't have a relationship either, she's remarried and stuff like that. So my grandmother, she's like my best friend honestly."* (01:08:36) This generational transmission of values mirrors the matriarchy of ancient African societies. Whether this is due to inequities in opportunities (education, employment) between men and women of color, or something else (differences in motivation, inherent ability) needs to be explored further.

Participants also added that their families, in general, influence their values. One Atlanta participant stated, *"I have to give it to my parents, like both my mom and my dad, both of them were there in the house with me, happily married, and they took care of me and they showed me the best way to be in life, like to grow up and be something, don't just be out here being nothing."* (01:14:30) While an Oakland participant explained, *"I would say my parents and my brothers and sisters like my immediate family, because those are the people I see or I know [that] I can genuinely trust and love and respect and everything...also my grandparents, 'cause they taught me a lot about my history and my culture and stuff like that."* (01:06:45)

In addition to family, life experiences were also identified as influencing the values of African-American males. A participant in Baltimore shared, *"I think you go off of how your parents raised you, but once you go out, things change. I think it changes from day to day, it just depends on where you are in your life and how close you are to who you are inside."* (01:06:49) An Atlanta participant felt similarly, *"I would say my experiences, I can't necessarily give that to a person, but through the experiences I might share with that person or just personal experiences. But I don't want to reduce it to saying just my mom or just my dad gave it to me because it's an accumulation of all the different experiences."* (01:15:48) A participant in the Bronx concurred, *"I feel that life teaches you values, cause things change, people change. We are a constantly changing society."* (01:09:58)

The Role of Spirituality in the Lives of African-American Males

Although some African-American males believe in, and even a few professed strong religious faith, the belief system for the majority of young African-American males is not centered on the regular practice of organized religion (i.e., going to a church, mass or mosque). A participant in Detroit stated, *"On the initial survey I said religious, however now thinking about it you can realize that religion is man-made. So I would say I'm more so spiritual because there is more of a one-on-one relationship with God and religion is what the preacher is saying and what you get out of the text in the Bible."* (01:16:53) Another Detroit participant added, *"I believe I'm more spiritual, too. Religion, there's a lot of stuff that goes into that, but being spiritual is pretty much based off your relationship with God, so as long as you got that I think you alright."* (01:14:52) An Atlanta participant explained, *"I definitely think there's a difference between religion and spirituality - I'm actually a religion major in college. So when I say God, I actually mean the spiritual aspect, because the religious aspect is more of the doctrine and man-made construct of it all."* (01:08:24)

In fact, many African-American males seem to express a lack of an individualized spiritual center, one based on a higher power that guides what happens in the world. As an Atlanta participant stated, *"I kind of distinguish between the two, and by God I don't necessarily mean someone's religion because personally I don't have a set religion; I'm agnostic even though my family is originally Baptist. When I say God, I mean I believe there's a higher power. That's what keeps me going, like, whatever this universe has to offer me, whoever's the one that created us, they have a plan set for me and as long as I believe in that plan I can get through anything."* (01:07:54) This could be connected to an environmental context in which "bad things happen to good people" on a regular basis.

How, for example, do you believe in a God who creates a world where some have and others have not, based simply on skin color? Or that "lets" those who are supposed to protect and serve them instead harass, harm or even kill them? Churches in general are having their challenges connecting with the millennial generation, particularly those who were not "made" to attend church or other religious services with their families. Belief in a higher power is one way humans attempt to make sense out of life. A New Orleans participant explained, *"When I say spirituality I just mean, most important for myself is believing in something. Anything whether it's Buddha, Yahweh, Jihad, yourself, as long as you believe in something and have faith in something that's keeping you pushing for betterment of self, or love of everyone else around you then, that's what I mean by spirituality...I'm more spiritual than religious, but I do indulge into different religions."* (01:09:20) But when life seems to have no rhyme or reason, where do you turn?

Findings from MEE's Inner City Truth 3 (ICT3) lifestyle survey indicated many youth have concluded that all they can really depend on and believe in is themselves. When asked if they believed that it is up to them to make things happen in their life, 93% of the African-American males surveyed either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with that statement. A participant in New Orleans seemed to speak to this, *"I'm more of a 'show me' kind of person, and when you talk about religion, I feel like religion is very convenient for a lot of people, and a lot of people fit religion to what they need. And that's something that's for certain individuals, but it's not for me as an individual. I feel like I can get by doing things my own way instead of having this belief that there's somebody somewhere pulling strings that*

we can't see. Those sort of things don't really appeal to me." (01:11:12)

Obstacles to Living Out One's Values

Having a set of values and then *living* those values on a daily basis seem to be two different things to these African-American males. That dichotomy is connected to barriers that are both internal (personal/mental) and external (social determinants). If one's set of values represents the core of who you are and what you believe, to what extent can the outside world destroy them? For example, Africans brought to America did not immediately leave their communal values on the shores of the Motherland. In fact, perhaps they helped sustain their families through the cruel realities of oppression. For decades, a strong social fabric remained in place, but then began to be stretched and torn. Are there other external forces at play that impact the dilution of values among some young boys and men of color?

African-American males often mentioned personal behaviors that "block their blessings"... not having a plan, not knowing they need a plan, not working the plan. Multiple participants talked about how procrastinating can be an obstacle. One participant from Bronx stated, *"One of my values was 'drive to succeed.' If you're not driven to succeed and you're procrastinating, that's blocking a value. You can't get anywhere if you're not driven to do it."* (01:14:55) Another Bronx participant added, *"As a college student, everything you just said resonates with me. Procrastination is a deadly thing. When you wait till the last minute to do something and you're cramming then it might not come out the best. Then you look back at all the time you had to do it."* (01:15:20) One participant from New Orleans discussed his poor decision making, *"I used to make a lot of dumb decisions. I used to always start from here and make it to here and it would be a dumb decision that would put me back at part one ... Now, the only thing stopping me is me."* (01:14:55)

Many African-American males are so beat down either from previous failures or by people who tell them (by word or deed) that they will not amount to anything, they have effectively given up. They don't see a clear path from the bottom to the top. Maybe they don't feel worthy of success. Several African-American males in New York talked about the "fear of failure" as a barrier to living out one's values or achieving success. One Bronx participant stated, *"For me, it's the fear of failure. I try to do things I know I can do, or know I can get. I don't wanna do something and get let down, I'm tired of being let down. Like if I know I'm qualified for a certain job, I would go for that job. I wouldn't try to reach beyond that job because I don't want to be let down at the end and not get it. A lot of times, constant disappointments can make you not wanna try no more."* (01:32:09) Another participant followed up, *"I agree with him, basically being scared of failure. I would try my best, but I'd be so scared of failure, it would stop me at a certain point to going beyond my full potential."* (01:32:50)

The environment reflects neglect and failure, further killing motivation among African-American males. They live in the forgotten zones, the ones that don't get the attention because they are not where votes or power or money reside. And the American criminal justice system "disappears" thousands of African-American males, either by locking them up or making it virtually impossible to successfully re-enter society once they have done their time. As one Oakland participant explained, *"Just walk outside, it's a lot of drug activity, that's bad influence, that can stop somebody right there from doing what they need to do. Just the community, looking out the window, it's hard growing up in a place like this, it ain't too much motivation."* (01:30:11) An Atlanta participant stated, *"I grew up in a very, very stressful neighborhood. I grew up in between Bloods, Crips, and MS-13s. So there were some days, walking to school, I had to wear a certain color just to get through different neighborhoods, or get a ride from my friend, or jump on the bus. I couldn't trust nobody, because I was afraid of getting jumped or robbed or something."* (01:22:40)

Peers don't seem to be motivating each other to succeed and in large part don't know how to positively motivate each other. One Atlanta participant explained, *"people acting like crabs in a bucket."* (01:17:43) Groups of African-American males don't regularly get together to pool business ideas or study together; social time is for immediate pleasures and/or forgetting. Those with the motivation to succeed mentioned having to let some of their buddies go and pave their own path out. If they really want to be successful, they said, they choose to become "lone wolves." The exodus from one's community once a male of color begins to achieve success is not a new pattern; the consequence is that "old-heads" as role models who could motivate the younger generation are few and far between. A New Orleans participant explained, *"They need to see more Black men thriving. When you don't see someone that looks like you thriving then that wears on you. You think 'why isn't someone that looks like me*

thriving?’ then you start to think that you can’t do it because there is no one out there like you that is doing it...So you need the resources to get there and someone to show you how to use those resources.” (01:25:31)

These are societal barriers that keep African-American males from being successful, those imposed by what has traditionally been the majority, power-holding sector. Racism, both institutionalized and personally delivered, retains a strong hold. Roughly 4 out of 10 (38%) African-American males from MEE’s ICT3 survey “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that their race/ethnicity limited the opportunities they had in life. Another 28% were “neutral” to the statement. African-American youth feel they are still discriminated against by American institutions and many individuals. One Oakland participant described racism in the workforce: *“All of us being Black. That’s a big thing walking into a job interview. ‘Oh, he’s Black,’ so that might take some points off right there.” (01:11:22)* A Detroit participant stated, *“You gotta be careful out here, a lot of stuff you do you just gotta know how to act and you gotta learn how to play the game going through life especially. Being Black you gotta know the right things to do out here just so you can transition a little easier into what you wanna get.”* When asked by the moderator if being a Black male gets in the way, the participant continued. *“It can because you’re limited from particular opportunities.” (01:21:58)*

Some African-American males who have given up actively fighting to overcome the barriers in their environment and personal lives turn to the kind of self-medication that further complicates the cycle of failure, escaping their current realities. Staying high allows one not to think about the problems in their lives, but does not make them disappear.

Money is both a value and a barrier in the lives of African-American males. They see poverty and a lack of resources as undermining their quest to achieve success in life. One New Orleans participant explained, *“Finances. Basically, I can’t fill nobody else’s cup if mine isn’t full. Just what I’ve seen in the past, if you have financial struggles or you’re going through those personal struggles, you’re not really there to serve others...mentally you’re thinking of your own survival.” (01:13:57)* Because that barrier so often seems insurmountable, African-American males often don’t look beyond money as a solution for finding happiness and contentment in life. As one Oakland participant stated, *“The economy is horrible, in Oakland it’s horrible to try to find a job...and then like to be truly happy you can’t really do that without no money.” (01:14:10)* Those participants that were pursuing higher education, discussed how money was a barrier to them achieving their goals. A Detroit participant stated, *“With me, success is a huge thing because I’m trying to go to med school to be a pediatrician. But the way the school system is set up, it’s very difficult because you have to have a job to pay for school just to graduate, and get a job to pay the debt you got from school. So that’s part of the roadblock that I’m facing. (01:19:50)* Another Detroit participant added, *“I think the school system plays a big part of things, especially in my life, reaching the goals that I want to reach. I’m a workaholic and I like to work, and if I work part time, to go to school, that’s going to take away from my funds to pay for school. So, it’s a lot...I wanna do journalism and broadcasting, but I always argue with myself about when is the right time to go back to school versus working so I can survive and eat?” (01:21:01)*

An Oakland participant explained how a lack of resources can have a negative impact on one’s ability to achieve success, *“Resources; access to resources. Like I said, I do graphic design, but I can’t do that if I don’t have a computer – a place to do my work.” (01:15:30)*

From previous MEE research, we have learned that the skills and talents of African-American males who thrive serve multiple purposes. While their skills and talents support the development of an action plan and achieving goals, they also come into play as a positive coping mechanism in day-to-day existence. African-American male thrivers are connected to non-judgmental (mostly non-parental) adults in their lives; old-heads and others who have “been there, done that” provide models and roadmaps to success. These mentors are steering/guiding/exposing them to how to break the cycle (i.e., deal with life, racism, relationships and other stressors) and teaching them, as Psychologist Dr. Joseph L. White says, “opportunity-finding skills” in school or the work world. The African-American males we spoke to seem to understand and value the importance of mentors. In a survey completed prior to the focus groups, 94% of them felt that it was important to have a mentor in their life.

Success and Optimal Health

This section aimed to understand how African-American males defined success and understand what they need in order to thrive.

The Difference Between Surviving and Thriving

In many ways, African-American males saw surviving as only incrementally better than surviving. Surviving is operating at a basic level of existence – just getting by on a day-to-day basis. An Oakland participant provided a personal example, *“Surviving just comes down to doing what you’ve got to do. For example, I just saw my cousin and he was going to rob somebody just ‘cause he needed some milk for his daughter, and he didn’t have the money for it.”* (01:18:21) A New Orleans participant provided another personal example, *“From what I’ve been through, I would say that surviving is having at least two meals a day and having a few dollars in your pocket. Not too much.”* (01:16:50) An Oakland participant explained, *“I think when you’re homeless that’s survival, when every day is a struggle that’s surviving.”* (01:16:33) Another New Orleans participant agreed, *“Surviving is doing just enough to get by. Surviving is just working paycheck to paycheck. I got a lot of family members back home that have all these dreams, but they just do enough to survive.”* (01:17:15)

If one is thriving, on the other hand, he has gained some wiggle room, some flexibility and is focused on excelling. As a Baltimore participant explained, *“Thriving, I think that’s like a self-motivational thing. If you thrive to make money like he said, you’re going to make money. There’s nothing gonna stop you. Some people need to be motivated, some people don’t.”* (01:17:49) A Detroit participant added, *“Thriving is, like he said, being a workaholic, making sacrifices so that you can make it through life and excel.”* (01:23:28) Another Detroit participant agreed, *“Thriving is when you’re trying to get somewhere. Surviving – you are just doing what you gotta do to just get by.”* (01:23:41)

Thriving was also described mainly in financial terms, having enough money to be able to take care of self and family and even to own part of the American Dream. As an Oakland participant stated, *“Thriving is you being successful, being able to take care of yourself, maybe your kids too if you have them, your loved one and possibly be able to take care of your parents or help out others with your money and your time.”* (01:15:54) Another Oakland participant described thriving as going after what you want. He stated, *“To thrive is to like really go out the box and push for what you want.”* (01:16:20)

Many parts of that Dream (i.e., land of the free) don’t happen the way that African-American males sometimes anticipate. Yet, even the examples of thriving were basic as in not struggling day-to-day or living check-to-check. African-American males’ definitions/awareness of thriving described how they would feel “on top of things” and working toward their life goals without being negatively influenced by others. Broader definitions of what it means to thrive were mostly missing from the dialogue. This indicates that there is room for African-American males to be enlightened and educated about how to look at (and seek out) thriving from a broader perspective. Older males can be a great source of guidance by providing this perspective through life (because “you don’t get to be old being no fool”).

African-American Males Define Success and Their Exposure to Successful People

The concept of “being successful” resonated more with African-American males than the dialogue about surviving vs. thriving. African-American males were most positive in their descriptions of success, which could be categorized in the following ways: “being financially comfortable;” “taking care of family;” and “happiness and leaving a legacy.”

African-American males didn’t see success necessarily in grandiose terms, rather they looked at it more from the sense of security and comfort for themselves. As one Oakland participant explained, *“From the beginning, you got to be able to provide for yourself...it all starts with that and you can advance from there to being somebody.”* (01:26:39) An Atlanta participant explained, *“Having an education, owning your own business and being wealthy. You can do whatever you want to so as long as you have those three things.”* (01:34:06) An Oakland participant added, *“[Success is] people who are rich, people who have money who don’t have to worry about their bills.”* (01:18:06)

These descriptions of success, centered on being able to provide for self, reflected many of the core elements of a young man who is thriving. Several mentioned being able to progress along to have enough to also help out family when needed as being successful. A participant in Detroit stated, *"Nice house, nice car, probably married, and I would be able to help my family, able to help my parents if they need it. That's success for me, I'd be straight."* (01:27:25) Another added, *"Being able to have something in your name, not just having to rent ... a car or a house. And being able to take care of your family."* (01:28:00) A participant in New Orleans explained, *"Having a nice house, nice couple cars, putting my little brother up, cause my little brother is 4 years old...I would rather put my mom in a nice house, same for me ... If I'm successful I want to make sure my family's successful."* (01:29:50) Another participant, took it a step further in explaining how their version of success would include helping their community as well. He stated, *"Taking care and giving back not only to my family, but to everyone in my community, period."* (01:27:52)

However, boiling happiness down to financial success does not allow for the reality that money does not always buy happiness or health—again, a narrow, rather than a holistic perspective on life. A few participants referred to this. An Oakland participant stated, *"I think success is happiness, like if I can look back and I'm happy at the end of the day that's better than me being wealthy but unhappy."* (01:18:32) A New Orleans participant added, *"Success is happiness, whatever that is for you, that works. Some people want a bunch of cars, big house, some people don't. Some people are ok with doing volunteer work all their lives, if that's what you wanna do, that's success. Success isn't based on a value outside looking in, it's inside. I'm happy doing this, that's success for me."* (01:33:58)

Other African-American males spoke of success in terms of achieving their life purpose. A participant in New Orleans stated, *"I would say, accomplishing all major goals you set for yourself, whether it's finances, helping the next man, but at the same time, still obtaining inner peace – mental peace, and spirituality...Being stress free."* (01:31:15) While another added, *"Completing my life purpose. I don't really see success as a material thing, I see it as an individual thing and only you can really know when you got it."* (01:33:07) And yet others spoke of leaving a legacy, from which they would be remembered. An Oakland participant explained, *"I feel like success is the legacy you can set for yourself or your family, so that when you pass, it'll be like 'yeah my grandpa was the one who did this or did that.'" (01:19:53) An Atlanta male added, "Having a good education, owning your own business and having a family. Being a family man and having a legacy that can be passed down."* (01:34:27) Another Atlanta participant spoke of the legacy he wanted to leave. He stated, *"My vision is to put my parents up comfortably until the day I die. Being able to leave behind money, and I'm not talking hundreds of thousands, I'm talking millions and billions for the generations after me. Putting up charities for young Blacks and Hispanics...My vision of success is to leave behind a legacy of kindness, knowledge and wisdom."* (01:34:56)

Several participants mentioned things like procrastination, personal distractions and worries, negative community influence, and racism as hindrances to success, even for young men who have goals and a vision for their lives. Those goals, while well-intentioned, are not consistently completed.

Even though they may not have gained success for themselves yet, young African-American males seem to interact with people who have. Many of the successful people they know are within their nuclear and extended families — mostly female relatives such as mothers, sisters and aunts, who were raised in similar circumstances. Success has come in the form of small business ownership, college graduation and jobs that pay a good wage. They admired the knowledge and drive these relatives had shown in making their dreams a reality, and respected their ability to follow through on plans, by staying focused and motivating themselves. They were not pulled in by any ignorance or negativity around them.

Participants shared stories of those close to them whom they felt were successful:

- An Oakland participant discussed his sister, *"My sister, we came from the same spot...we bounced through foster homes until one of our family members was able to take us in. Now she's in college, she's about to graduate in May and be a registered nurse. I could be in her position, but I chose a different route...I'm proud of her, that's success right there."* (01:33:30) He continued, *"I respect my sister because she had the mentality to overcome the ignorance. To not follow, to lead, to do something better for herself because she wanted to."* (01:36:49)

- A participant in the Bronx discussed his sister, *"I'd say my sister is successful. She's a single mother, and she was able to get a college degree, a full time job working as a librarian, and she handles all this responsibility, she always puts her child first, she provides for her child, puts food on the table."* (01:38:24)
- A participant in New Orleans discussed his father, *"I would have to say my pops. My pops is the first successful person. Just his story, and where he's at now after being locked up in prison, and just how it's set up for you to be a second class citizen. And just fighting through those obstacles and getting where he's at. He's back at home in Alexandria, but I'm just saying with the amount of kids he had, and just how bad the situation looked fresh out, and where he's at now, with me graduating college and my brothers and sisters being in college, it's a different type of culture now. I see it as successful, just not seeing your situation as final or finite, and switching things around."* (01:36:08)
- A Detroit participant discussed his uncle, *"My uncle Butch. When I was younger he was in law school and now he's a lawyer. He was the only one who always seemed like he was on the up and up. A new house, new car, every time I see him...He worked hard. He work hard for sure. He didn't graduate high school or nothing, he just ended up going back getting his GED, and then just going crazy, going up and up. I respect him cause all his brothers were going down the same road, then he had a wake-up call and turned his life around."* (01:33:48)
- Another Detroit participant discussed his uncle, *"I would say my uncle for numerous reasons. He played sports since he was little, he played football at the University of Michigan. He joined a fraternity there, he balanced both of those and still did great in school. Now he works for Nissan so every 2 years, he just has cars at his luxury of what he wants to choose from, and he owns his own house, has a nice successful marriage with 2 daughters, so that's what I see as successful."* (01:36:46)
- A Detroit participant discussed his grandmother, *"I think my Grandma is successful. She owns some houses, she owns some cars, and she be going on trips."* (01:33:30)
- A New Orleans participant discussed his grandmother as well, *"I'm going to say my Grandmother, she's a real estate agent. She retired from Shell Corporation, she did that for 35-40 years, and she doubled back and started doing real estate. She is a successful woman. I don't look at being successful as in having all the things a successful person would have...she just has all the mindsets of being successful."* (01:37:20)
- An Oakland participant discussed a family with multiple success stories, *"For me, going back to my great-grandparents, my great-granddad actually helped start this church that we're in right now...and pretty much all my family members that have gone off to do amazing things and really instill education in all of our family."* (01:25:35)

Mentoring programs that engender a strong sense of self and internal motivation will help African-American males achieve at the same level of those relatives who have already found a way to climb out of poverty and circumvented life choices, with their "eyes on the prize." With modeling, from men they respect, African-American males can be the next generation of achievers.

What African-American Males Need to be Successful

Young African-American men discussed various needs that would help them be successful. First, is mentors (i.e., connectedness to positive, non-judgmental adults) who can provide a roadmap and help them navigate through barriers. As one Oakland participant noted, *"[We need] Adults, or elders, that are willing to connect with people they may not know at all... build a relationship, be really willing to know a person, rather than to pre-judge a person and then just write them off."* (01:17:31) A Baltimore participant added, *"Basically I think [we] need the support. We just need support. If you don't got nobody backing you, I know he said he's been on his own since he was 13, but if no one ever gave him an opportunity, he'd probably be in the same place as everybody else. So you need that support, someone that's gonna pick you up when you down."* (01:25:08) Another Oakland participant gave an example of the positive impact of mentor programs, *"I think we need more positive outreach programs, I used to be in this program called MBK (My Brother's Keeper) and it was out here in Oakland...it was like African Americans, they put you together, they had us up at Cal State University doing Algebra classes, teaching us a bunch of stuff, I just think they need a whole bunch more positive programs just like that to put people together."* (01:23:18)

Male mentors can expose them to new horizons, skills and success strategies, while neighborhood "old-heads" provide a friendly ear and the "been-there-done-that" models of what it takes to overcome a negative environment and other obstacles (such as negative peer influence and drug use). Both sets of men can help African-American

males create, stay focused on, and master their success plans, with a sense of urgency, rather than procrastination. As one Atlanta participant stated, *"They had Malcolm X, MLK, and people like that to help the community to go in one direction, that it's the right path, to do the right thing,...we don't have that these days. I mean, we don't have nobody out telling you 'you need to do this, do that, go to school,' they don't care. And the neighborhood, they could care less."* (01:27:44) Another participant added, *"I agree with the fact that we need more people to mentor the kids, and get them on the right path."* (01:30:18)

Young African-American men also realized that personal ambition and follow-through play an important role in being successful. As one Oakland participant stated, *"My problem is that I have all these goals and I have this vision that I see for my life which is all great and I'm working on my goals but not completing them."* (01:22:39) A participant in Detroit explained how easy it is to get distracted, *"Say there's like a game on or something, I'll say I'm about to do my homework, but then I'll be like 'in five minutes I'm gonna do it,' and then five minutes comes I'll be like 'I'll do it in three minutes,' and then that comes, and I just don't do it. I'll come up with an excuse in my head about why I don't need to do it."* (01:31:46) African-American males also mentioned more access to education.

The Importance of Respect for African-American Males

Respect is a valuable commodity to African-American males. African-American males said that their peer group does not get enough respect from society. As a participant in Atlanta mentioned, *"I think we don't get respect at all. I think they kind of try to watch us to see what our next move is. We're like an animal in a cage...Because we've been stereotyped and branded and don't get the respect of actually being human beings, and being of the same country."* (01:51:26) A participant in the Bronx added, *"We [Black people] are the most disrespected people on the planet if you ask me. Black men and women are disrespected. I mean we disrespect our women as much as everybody else does. I think Black people as a whole, even Latin people, Native people get more respect. We're the most disrespected people on the planet. I think only white people get respect in this country. Maybe even sometimes people from other nations because they come here, set up shop, and even sometimes kiss the white man's ass, and they get more respect than we'll ever get."* (01:41:25)

Overall, celebrities and people with money and power were seen as getting respect, whether they had earned it with their personal behaviors or not. On a more individual level, young African-American males said people who are honest and have integrity are more likely to earn respect.

African-American Males Define Optimal Health

African-American males see "health" almost entirely in physical terms, influenced by what you eat and how much you move. When asked what it meant to be healthy, participants used physical terms like: eating well; exercising or working out; going to the doctor for regular checkups; knowing what you put in your body; getting enough sleep; having good nutrition (e.g. eating three meals a day); and good hygiene. There was less unprompted mention of the emotional or mental aspects of health with only a couple participants stating: not stressing; gaining knowledge; having a positive mindset on things; and having your mind right.

When asked to elaborate, an Oakland participant stated, *"Just not damaging your body, like tattoos, all this sh** ain't being healthy, smoking, drinking, that sh** ain't being healthy, even cursin."* (01:39:35) A participant in New Orleans commented, *"I feel like being healthy is understanding that the mind, body and soul are working correspondingly together. So with that being said, one that can basically stay fit, and not really put toxins in their body, and keep inner peace. Really just treat your body as a temple, have respect for it."* (01:46:12) A Detroit participant added, *"I would say physical and mental health, basically, obviously not being obese and having it all in the mind."* (01:39:15)

When asked to describe what it would feel like to be on "top of one's game" as a manifestation of health, African-American males passionately described feeling positive, powerful, confident and not stressed or worried. Comments included:

- An Oakland participant stated, *"I'd be able to do anything without even having to worry about it."* (01:35:02)

- An Atlanta participant stated, *"It would feel great. For me at the top of my game it would be being able to see my mom or dad smile. Even though they're sick, seeing my mom or dad smile. Being able to call my sister up and tell em I'm doing this this and that and they say 'good job. Keep it moving. I'm making money I'm making music, and I'm doing what I love. That's the top of my game.'" (01:59:18)*
- Another Atlanta participant commented, *"When I'm at the top of my game it's ecstasy. I'm on point, nothing could take me down, I could walk through any neighborhood, you can say whatever you want I don't care, I'm just looking forward, that's all that matters to me. And I can focus better and sleep better." (01:59:47)*
- A participant in New Orleans explained, *"It would feel peaceful. You know you doing everything you've gotta do, you know you're doing it at the top level...you don't have any worries because you know at the end of the day you're doing the best that you can do and there's nothing more." (01:49:22)*
- Another New Orleans participant commented, *"It feels like when you're playing a video game and you beat the boss...I did how it was written. I finished the last achievement and I got my reward." (01:49:39)*
- Another Bronx participant commented, *"It feels like I'm not even trying...things fall into place." (01:48:54)*

Another participant in the Bronx, reminisced about a time in his past where he felt he was at the top of his game. He stated, *"I remember a time in high school when I was definitely on the top of my game, so I'm just going to go off of that frame of reference. Everything that I did turned out to be the best that I put forward. It came with a level of success. I was doing well in school, me and my ex at the time, we were on a great level of intimacy, respect, love, and understanding, and it just felt like everything at that point, like I didn't have to worry about certain things, certain things just came naturally. Like I said, I was putting my best foot forward in just about everything I did, and it came to be a success. That's the level I'm trying to get back to." (01:47:35)*

Another Oakland participant expressed how optimal health could change his life circumstances. *"I'd be thinking better, I'd probably be at work right now, it comes different when you're healthy, you just think better, you're positive." (01:41:05)* While a participant in New Orleans that was recently released from jail stated that optimal health was a day-to-day focus for him, *"To be at the top of my game. See I haven't had a job in a minute and I just started this new job working with my grandfather and on top of that working for a construction company...To be on top of my game is just waking up every morning, being dedicated to do these jobs. And just staying positive, and if I like it or don't like it, just make sure I'm there every day and respect what I have and be appreciative." (01:50:43)*

Competition/Winning/Skills and Creative Talents

This section aims to understand how African-American males define and how they value competition. We also asked them to discuss their opportunities to pursue the American Dream, relative to mainstream populations. They talked about their personal talents and abilities and how those helped them compete in life.

Life as a Competition

Competition is ingrained in the lives of young African-American males; they see competition against others as a necessary but unwelcomed part of life. As an Oakland participant stated, *"Life's a competition, 'cause you're competing against everyone to do what you want to do." (01:45:40)* An Atlanta participant added, *"Everything is a competition. You've got to compete in life to be successful." (02:10:18)* They see themselves as competing for jobs and for other scarce resources, an expected perspective considering America's capitalist society. An Oakland participant stated, *"Competing against other people, you [are] going for that job, there's other people going for that job, it's a competition to get that job." (01:44:26)* A Bronx participant explained, *"Life in America is a competition. This country is a giant business; it's a well-oiled machine. In this country, especially with capitalism, the point is to step on whoever's neck you've got to in order to get ahead. There is no such thing as free lunch. Everything that you got, costs somebody else. Our people, we're behind everybody. Everybody got a 40-mile head start and we gotta sprint, just to catch up. So I'd say over here, in America, it is a competition." (01:57:40)* A Detroit participant elaborated, *"Everyone's not going to make it, that's how I feel. There's probably a million people that want the same thing that you wanna do. And there may be one slot for that one position or that one dream job or that one thing that you wanna do, but somebody else is going to want to do that. And you have to compete with them, and there's only one person that's gonna win." (01:44:49)* An Oakland participant had similar thoughts, *"It's a rat race,*

especially in the USA. We are all bred to think like capitalists...don't help anyone else, you've got to get there before the next man or else that spot's taken. That's how you're taught and bred to think." (01:40:50)

We recommend message strategies that help African-American males see that the primary competition should be with themselves — being the best they can be — rather than focusing on besting someone else. Operating at a level close to one's personal best, being at the top of one's game, also represents the optimal health and wellness we want African-American males to achieve. An Oakland participant shared this sentiment, *"Competition is just trying to perform at your best so you can get whatever you're going for, whatever you're competing for, you're trying to get it so just performing to the best of your abilities."* (01:45:24) A Detroit participant agreed, *"I think you're pretty much just competing with yourself. If you do what you supposed to do, you're going to be straight. You'll be alright. All the bad habits and stuff that you've got going on, that's what you're competing against."* (01:44:11) A male in New Orleans added, *"As far as life being a competition, not with another man. I feel like my competition, me personally, is being better than the man I was yesterday."* (02:15:38) While a participant in Baltimore had similar feelings, *"I don't think a competition of life is for anybody else but yourself. Cause you've got to do what you have to do for yourself. But in a way, I would say it's a competition cause there's people that's rich, people that's middle class, people that's low class. So yeah I guess it's a competition."* (01:51:29)

Participants said that having a plan and someone to help guide you through it would help African-American males "win at life."

Reaction to Moderator's Statement on the "American Promise"

The moderator read the following statement of the "American Promise:" "If you do certain things in life, if you work hard, if you develop a skill, if you do the right thing, then you get rewards...you get a raise...you get recognition...you get respect."

The "American Promise" seems to have been made to others. African-American males were skeptical that hard work, developing a skill and doing the right thing would automatically lead to rewards like raises, recognition and respect. One Oakland participant stated, *"It sounds like the cliché American Dream, that's what they said back in the day...it's not true."* (01:44:15) There's no guarantee of a payoff, even if one follows a path that is supposed to lead to success, not for African-American males in America. A participant in Detroit explained, *"Sometimes, I mean there's always something that always knock you down. So, I mean, no matter if you're doing the right thing, there's always something that can trip you up, so it just depends kinda."* (01:47:01) An Atlanta participant agreed, *"Yes and no. There are people out here who have developed master skills in their craft, and they're homeless. So I honestly believe yes and no."* (02:13:10) As did a participant in Baltimore, *"I think there are two sides of the bread, there is the burnt side and course side. I think that if you do all of those things, you might not get everything. Then there are some people for where that's the flip side. They do everything and they get recognized."* (01:57:22)

Participants gave examples of how they hear all this talk about education being a path to success, but knew of examples of people who graduated from school only to be unable to find a job with a living wage. Another Oakland participant expressed his frustration, *"You come out, there's no work place to put your degree to use ... I talk a lot about education and how important that is but at the same time let's be realistic, can it really help?"* (01:46:38) Stories like this, for themselves or others in their peer group, make the "dream" feel unrealistic, a relic of America's past and out of reach.

Participants suspected that success is really all about having connections and family resources. They also noted that procrastination and getting distracted by peers and the environment can undermine one's progress. However, a strong work ethic, along with a realistic, detailed plan (with achievable micro-steps) to follow *will* pay off. Mistakes and hard times are part of life; being equipped to deal with them and still be resilient could be a key to long-term success. An Oakland male explained, *"At the end of the day, if you know you're working hard you might take a little bit longer than expected...[if you're] striving for something you're looking forward to, it'll eventually pay off."* (01:47:04) An Oakland participant cautioned, *"You can be the master of your abilities and have everything working in your favor and things could all come crashing down, that'll knock you out, that'll ruin your whole reality."* (01:47:33)

Participants felt that being dedicated to personal goals, reading and hard work were more important to achieving success.

The Creative Talents of African-American Males

Young African-American men know that they are much more than the stereotypes assigned to them. They are more than “natural” athletes and prolific rappers and musicians. As one Oakland participant noted, *“That’s the main stereotype right there, [that] since he’s Black, he good at some type of sport, he can probably run fast.”* (01:50:30) He added, *“It’s just a lot of stereotypes, everybody ain’t the same.”* (01:51:21)

African-American males are also doctors and lawyers; they excel at many other skills and professions. Some noted that, in spite of what one sees in the media, the number of African-American males in “highly-skilled” professions outside sports exponentially outweighs the number of athletes in America. An Oakland participant stated, *“I was actually reading an article and it said there’s like 12,000 African-American athletes that play professionally in the US and there are like eight times more lawyers, twelve times more doctors and stuff like that...it’s just the media that makes it seem like that’s all we can do.”* (01:52:27) A participant in New Orleans stated, *“It’s stereotypical that they expect us to only excel at sports and physical things. If you really want to look at history, there was a whole new Negro movement. They only show you the renaissance of Europe and the French Renaissance...but the Three Musketeers was written by a Black man. We are originators and creators of this world. We have a lot of capabilities, so that’s a confusing question to me.”* (02:07:24) As a participant in Atlanta agreed, *“Looking at history, we have excelled at everything. At some point in time in history and in the future we are going to excel at a little bit of everything.”* (02:18:27)

Young African-American men delineated differences between creativity and talent. Talent is something one is born with (it can be enhanced and developed); it is God-given. Creativity can be demonstrated in how one does things, including solving problems and even just surviving a hard-knock life. As one Oakland participant noted, *“You’ve got to be creative when you’re homeless because you’ve always got to figure out what you’re about to eat, where you’re about to go, where you’re about to sleep, or how you’re gonna make money. That’s the kind of the position I’m in. I feel like I’m being creative every day.”* (01:53:45) Creative people think outside the box, are adaptable and can use whatever resources are available to them to make things happen. A Bronx participant explained, *“Creativeness is the ability to bring forth, whether it’s a material, an idea, a movement or anything like that. It comes from within, and your ability to bring it forth. Talent is the ability to harbor that ability to bring forth. Your talent is what makes you skilled in that ability to bring something forth, your creativeness.”* (02:04:58) An Atlanta participant agreed, *“They go hand in hand for me. Like, I play guitar. That’s a talent of mine. But to be creative with it and to turn it into something else and be able to use my guitar to make me some money or just make somebody happy or laugh, that’s the creativity. So it’s being able to take a skill that you have and use it in a different way or make something new out of it.”* (02:16:10)

In discussing talent and creativity, participants also stressed the need for hard work. As one New Orleans participant explained, *I think you have to balance between being creative and talented but you also have to be hard working. Talent never beats out hard work.”* (02:04:52) A participant in Detroit agreed, *“I think talent is more God-given. But I read a book called Talent Isn’t Enough because hard work can beat out talent any day. You don’t have to be the most talented person, but if you work harder, you might make it over him because he could be talented but lazy.”* (01:50:25) *“You have to promote yourself. You have to be persistent. If you have a talent, and you know you can take it a step further, you gotta be on top of that. Nothing is going to come to you. It can, but you could f*ck around and wait 50 years for something to come to you, as opposed to that same year, you could put in all that work effort and obtain it yourself,”* (02:04:32) stated a participant in Baltimore.

Resources for Enhancing Creative Talents and Skills of African-American Males

Few participants were aware of resources specifically dedicated to helping African-American males hone their talents and skills. Reaching mastery requires time and opportunities to *“practice, practice, practice.”* It also helps to study at the side of someone who has already treaded the path a younger man is just beginning. This is an opportunity for mentors to come into play, because they can be valuable sounding boards. In addition, African-American males need resources that help them enhance their inherent talents into skills that help them achieve their goals. Funders should concentrate on identifying and backing mentoring programs and initiatives that provide

a two-pronged path to success for African-American males. They must provide African-American males with positive coping skills that allow them to express themselves and relieve stress; however, they must also equally enhance the skills that allow African-American males to successfully compete and “win” in life. The latter will support African-American males in staying on a path towards success and thriving, overcoming the negative pull of the environment. Those resources can be delivered via personal connections, online destinations and/or mobile apps and social media interactions.

Existing Online/Offline Resources for African-American Males

When asked what type of mobile app they would want that would help them be successful, participants had a variety of answer:

- A Detroit participant stated, *“A free career aptitude test, and I only say that because sometimes I find myself wondering if with the length of time I’m going to be in med school and other schooling, do I really want to do this, is my heart set in it. So with an aptitude test, you can kind of find out subconscious things about yourself that you like and dislike.”* (02:06:45)
- Another Detroit participant that wanted to be a hip-hop artist stated, *“An app where I could record music and then send it to like the biggest producers.”* (02:07:39)
- A participant in the Bronx explained, *“I would need it to be versatile, a versatile kind of place. Not only set to one person’s desire, somewhere that anyone can go to no matter what kind of community you’re a part of. If you have a desire and a drive to do something they can help point you in that direction, they can help give you information you may be looking for, they can help you fine tune whatever it is you came in to do. Just a place that gets you there.”* (02:14:50)
- A Baltimore participant wanted an app to help with employment, *“I need a job app where I can go in there, and it’ll say you can go to an interview today, or schedule an interview. I don’t want it where you’re just telling me the job is hiring and when you call they say ‘We’re not hiring anymore.’ That’s the ideal app that I want, something that actually helps you get a job within a week.”* (02:16:04)
- Two participants in Oakland wanted employment assistance as well. One stated, *“I’d like a job app that would show you that you could actually put your information in, and this is what I want to sign up for and see if I’m eligible to qualify. And if I am, they just hit me right then and there.”* (02:03:45) Another explained, *“I want a how-to app. Like if I wanted a certain job it’d be an app that would tell me how to do that job, or what I’ve got to do to get that job. You could type in what the job is, and then you could search it, and then it would pull up what you need to do to get the job, the degrees you need, the schooling, and all of that and it would lay it out for you.”* (02:06:53)
- A Baltimore participant wanted an app that would help him understand what he needed to do to start a business. *“I would make an entrepreneurial app. Just for the simple fact that I want to own my own business. So I’d have people on there, like mini documentaries with successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurs, just to see how they made it or how they were successful, or with the ones that wasn’t, what they did wrong.”* (02:17:17)
- Another Baltimore participant stated, *“I’d say a training app. Because like, some things that I learn are helping, but it’s not really helping me go to the next level. It’s keeping me the same so I need something that gets me going up, up, up.”* (02:16:55) While yet another wanted an app that allows you to patent your creative ideas.
- A participant in Oakland wanted an app that provided information on community resources. *“We need a resource, an app that we can download then it would pop up all of our resources, in the Black community. Somewhere we can go to that’s free because most people will go to something that’s free.”* (02:04:50)

FOCUS GROUP VIDEO PROFILES

Understanding Young Men of Color

The videos contain footage from both the African-American and Latino focus groups. In the videos, you will hear the voices of these young men as they explain what boys and men of color need in order to help them overcome the challenges and obstacles they face in their day-to-day lives and increase their positive health outcomes.



To view the complete video, go to the following link:

<http://bit.ly/1TxgOHQ>

To view the video in chapters, go to the following link:

<http://bit.ly/1RktfEB>

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Planning Phase

During the Project Planning phase, MEE Productions, Dr. Chu Chu Saunders and Darryl Cobbin held a series of planning meetings/conference calls to develop and finalize the official Project Work Plan with requisite tasks and timeline to meet the project deadline. Discussions were centered on project objectives, the research agenda, anticipated constraints, project management protocols, and project schedule.

Sizing the Market

MEE, Dr. Saunders and Darryl Cobbin used US Census data to conduct demographic analysis in order to help identify the size of the primary audience and secondary sub-audiences (markets) for the Branded BMOC Online/Offline “Optimal Choice” Platform (i.e., size of primary market who will use App; who will purchase App for BMOC and size of the market in major urban markets). This process addressed identifying who the primary and secondary sub-audiences for a marketing campaign should be. These audiences were identified with demographic markers to include age, race/ethnicity, gender, family income, “influencer power,” etc. It also helped to determine which sub-audiences should be reached through media advertising, and which audiences should receive “touches” at the grassroots level.

Research Design Development; Recruitment and Trial Focus Group

During this phase, MEE, Dr. Saunders and Darryl Cobbin designed and developed the appropriate data collection instruments (recruitment communications, screener, pre-focus group surveys and moderator guides).

MEE finalized and executed the plan for focus group recruiting. The focus group plan executed by MEE staff included: 1) recruitment of members of the target population (based on the US Census Data, the research profile and screener); 2) facilities coordination and logistics; pre-, during and post-focus groups; 3) participant consent and release forms; and 4) participant compensation.

During this phase, MEE also conducted a videotaped, trial focus group in Philadelphia to test the effectiveness of the moderator’s guide and timing of the focus groups. The trial group took place with African American youth on February 12, 2015.

In order to ensure the participating youth were from urban neighborhoods in the lowest quintile of the U.S. population for income, MEE utilized Microsoft Map Point 2013 to identify zip codes that contained census tracts with average yearly household incomes under \$40k and over-index in African American, Hispanics and Asians. Eligible youth were recruited in partnership with community-based organizations (CBOs) and schools either located in or servicing youth from the following targeted zip codes:

Philadelphia	19104, 19122, 19124, 19131, 19132, 19133, 19134, 19138, 19139, 19140, 19141, 19143, 19144, 19145, 19146
Los Angeles/Long Beach	90002, 90008, 90016, 90018, 90019, 90042, 90043, 90044, 90047, 90059, 90220, 90221, 90301, 90802, 90804, 90805, 90806, 90813
Oakland/Richmond	94601, 94603, 94607, 94612, 94621, 94801, 94804, 94806
New York City	10451, 10452, 10453, 10454, 10455, 10456, 10457, 10458, 10463, 10466, 10467, 10468, 10469, 10474, 10025, 10027, 10029, 10030, 10031, 10032, 10037, 10039
Baltimore	21202, 21206, 21213, 21215, 21216, 21217, 21218
Atlanta:	30310, 30311, 30312, 30313, 30314, 30315, 30316, 30318, 30331, 30337, 30344, 30344
New Orleans	70058, 70094, 70114, 70115, 70117, 70118, 70119, 70125, 70127
Detroit	48203, 48205, 48207, 48208, 48210, 48213, 48214, 48215, 48219, 48223, 48224, 48227, 48228, 48234

Focus Group Moderation

MEE conducted a series of videotaped focus groups in Oakland, Los Angeles, Long Beach, New York City, Baltimore, Atlanta, New Orleans and Detroit. Members of the MEE Project Team conducted and moderated the focus groups for African American and Latino males. At least one of the focus group moderators was the same ethnicity as the focus group participants. Each group contained four (4) to (5) participants. All groups were set-up so that note takers could privately observe the groups.

The MEE Project Team also conducted brief individual interviews with focus group participants before and after the focus group sessions. Focus group participants also completed a written survey prior to the focus group.

The focus group schedule was as follows:

Date	Audience	Number of Participants	Location
February 23, 2015	African American Males	5	Men of Valor Academy 6118 International Blvd. Oakland, CA 94621
February 24, 2015	African American Males	5	Allen Temple Baptist Church 8501 International Blvd. Oakland, CA 94621
February 25, 2015	Latino Males	4	Optimist Youth Homes 6857 Figueroa Street Los Angeles, CA 90042
February 26, 2015	Latino Males	5	Centro CHA Inc. 1900 Atlantic Ave 2 nd Floor Long Beach, CA 90806
April 7, 2015	African American Males	5	Madison Square Boys & Girls Club, Inc. 543 East 189th Street Bronx, NY 10458
April 9, 2015	African American Males	5	Youth Advocates Programs, Inc. 1 N. Charles Street, Suite #1100 Baltimore, MD 21201
May 6, 2015	African American Males	5	Atlanta Technical College Brenda Watts Jones - Allied Health Bldg. 1560 Metropolitan Parkway Atlanta, GA 30310-4446
May 7, 2015	African American Males	5	New Orleans Adult Learning Center 139 South Broad Street New Orleans, LA 70119
May 12, 2015	African American Males	5	The Mathis Community Center 19300 Greenfield Road Detroit, MI 48235

Data Coding and Analysis

The focus group research was comprehensively coded (via a combination of written notes and review of more than 20 hours of raw video footage) and analyzed using MEE's extensive multi-level process. It began with writing content summaries for each group. Coders, researchers and the video editor carefully identified themes and sub-themes that were used in later analysis to draw conclusions, including comparisons across groups.

APPENDIX A: AFRICAN-AMERICAN FOCUS GROUP SUMMARIES

**OAKLAND
NEW YORK CITY
BALTIMORE
ATLANTA
NEW ORLEANS
DETROIT**

Oakland Focus Group #1
Men of Valor Academy
6118 International Blvd., Oakland, CA 94621

Date: February 23, 2015
 Ethnicity: African-American Males
 Participants: 5 Participants (Average Age: 20 years-old)

Values

This section explores the personal values of low-income urban BMOC and the obstacles they face (real or perceived) in living out those values on a daily basis.

What BMOC Value

Participants were asked to write down their top three values on a note card. Though answers varied, family and financial success were mentioned consistently as top values. Other responses included: computer; knowledge; success; thoughts; providing for my family; career; God; and education.

Change in Values Based on Exercise

When given a handout with a list of values and asked to consider them against what they had previously written, the majority of the participants modified their top three values. Several indicated that they had changed their values for broader themes that would encompass their more specific values. One explained, *"I changed to talent/creativity from computer. I think that goes along with computer because I do graphic design, and that's all the same thing. Goes with making money as well, and I could be successful doing it."* (01:05:45) Family and financial success remained top values.

A couple of participants explained the importance of money. *"Money is important 'cause that's what society is built around so without money you can't do anything, so you're going to have to get it regardless."* (01:07:14) Another continued, *"I just want to live big, period. I dream big and I have big expectations for myself so money is almost everything to me."* (01:07:25) Another participant added, *"I mean who don't love money? Who don't want money in their pocket? Who wants to walk around broke? You know so that's just how I look at it, I don't ever want to be broke."* (01:08:33)

A few participants were asked to explain why they had chosen God/spirituality as a top value. One participant expressed that God had to be given credit for creating everything, while a couple of other participants acknowledged God for their immediate personal successes. One participant stated, *"I believe in God because I've been seeing my blessings come... it's been real good to have that type of faith in my life...that type of religion [and] belief."* (01:10:24) Another added, *"I worship 'cause he helps me get by, that's all I need."* (01:10:53).

Where BMOC Get Their Values

When asked where they got their values from, participants agreed that their values developed from multiple sources, including: learning from others (family and friends); external influences (neighborhood); and personal experiences. One participant elaborated, *"You can get values from anywhere; watching TV, seeing other people, family members growing up, you can pick that up from anywhere. Mix and match and you end up creating your own values, how you live your own life."* (01:08:55)

Obstacles to Living What BMOC Value

Participants were asked "what gets in the way from them living what they value?" Multiple participants shared different factors that impact how they live their lives, including external influences such as racism and stereotypes. One participant described racism in the workforce, *"All of us being Black. That's a big thing walking into a job interview. 'Oh, he's Black,' so that might take some points off right there."* (01:11:22)

Other responses included: negative influences in entertainment; poor nutrition choices in the community, the government, and lack of access to resources. A participant explained, *“Resources; access to resources. Like I said, I do graphic design, but I can’t do that if I don’t have a computer – a place to do my work.”* (01:15:30)

Participants felt having a purpose, “breaking the cycle” (of negative influences) and positive personal motivation/mindset were important strategies to help overcome obstacles.

When asked if there was anything that was holding them back from being the best they could be, one participant felt that life issues (e.g. having children) and the community environments made a difference. He claimed, *“Just walk outside, it’s a lot of drug activity, that’s bad influence, that can stop somebody right there from doing what they need to do. Just the community, looking out the window, it’s hard growing up in a place like this, it ain’t too much motivation.”* (01:30:11) Another participant expressed frustration at the lack of information on issues that could negatively impact community members (e.g. fines for not having health care).

Success and Optimal Health

This section aims to understand what success looks and feels like to BMOC, and explored what they need to thrive at the level of optimal health (physical, emotional, mental, etc.), rather than merely survive.

The Difference Between Surviving and Thriving

When asked what the difference between surviving and thriving was, participants described surviving as doing the bare minimum to get by. A participant provided an example, *“Surviving just comes down to doing what you’ve got to do. For example, I just saw my cousin and he was going to rob somebody just ‘cause he needed some milk for his daughter, and he didn’t have the money for it.”* (01:18:21)

On the other hand, thriving was described as being dedicated to one’s personal goals and motivations and not being influenced by outside distractions. A participant explained, *“Thriving is just having your own mindset and trying to do it, without you following the BS.”* (01:18:21)

BMOC Define Success and Their Exposure to Successful People

Participants were asked how they define success. Participants suggested that there are multiple levels to success and that it occurs across life stages. One explained, *“From the beginning you got to be able to provide for yourself...it all starts with that and you can advance from there to being somebody.”* (01:26:39) Other examples of success mentioned by participants included: having a career; financial success; providing for family; going to church; continuous growth; and making and achieving goals.

When asked who in their life they considered to be successful, a couple of participants revealed that they didn’t know anyone whom they considered successful. One participant mentioned his sister. *“My sister, we came from the same spot...we bounced through foster homes until one of our family members was able to take us in. Now she’s in college, she’s about to graduate in May and be a registered nurse. I could be in her position, but I chose a different route...I’m proud of her, that’s success right there.”* (01:33:30) Another mentioned a respected aunt who owned her own business and another mentioned peers who were on the path to college and careers.

In general, participants said that they respected the self-motivation and leadership of the successful people in their lives. A participant stated, *“I respect my sister because she had the mentality to overcome the ignorance. To not follow, to lead, to do something better for herself because she wanted to.”* (01:36:49) and *“I have to say self-motivation, that’s what I would respect the most out of them [peers in college].”* (01:37:23)

What BMOC Need to be Successful

When asked what types of things could help them be successful, a couple of participants suggested there was a need for more positive community programs, such as mentorships and community offices as being beneficial. One participant gave an example of the positive impact of mentor programs, *"I think we need more positive outreach programs, I used to be in this program called MBK (My Brother's Keeper) and it was out here in Oakland...it was like African American, they put you together, they had us up at Cal State University doing Algebra classes, teaching us a bunch of stuff, I just think they need a whole bunch more positive programs just like that to put people together."* (01:23:18) Others suggested increasing one's personal motivation; *"People just need to change their self...it shouldn't take somebody else to make you feel like 'I got to do better.'"* (01:23:52) Another participant suggested that a sense of security was needed, *"Being emotionally secure, knowing that they safe [physically and self-esteem]."* (01:21:59)

The Importance of Respect for BMOC

When asked what respect means to them, participants described respect in a variety of ways. One participant summed it up, *"Body language, verbal, mentally, physically, interaction...respect comes in all different types of forms and shapes."* (01:37:34)

When asked who gets respect in America, one participant initially expressed that anyone who gave respect could receive it. Participants also commented that those who were considered leaders or "bosses" were seen as the first to get respect. One participant described how mentors receive respect. *"A mentor, somebody who's leading, somebody who's basically at the forefront is the one who gets respect, the person with the power."* (01:39:14)

BMOC Define Optimal Health

When asked what it meant to be healthy, participants primarily focused on physical health. One commented, *"Just not damaging your body, like tattoos, all this sh** ain't being healthy, smoking, drinking, that sh** ain't being healthy, even cursin'"* (01:39:35) Participants also emphasized eating healthy and analyzing food product ingredients and processing.

When asked what it would feel like to be at the top of their game, one participant expressed how optimal health could change his life circumstances. *"I probably wouldn't be here, because my mind would be right... I'd be thinking better, I'd probably be at work right now, it comes different when you're healthy, you just think better, you're positive...but if you're unhealthy, somebody like me who smoke every day, you know I be lazy as hell, I'm not going to lie to you...no I'm not going to go to school today because I'm too high, I'm too lazy."* (01:41:05)

Competition/Winning/Skills and Creative Talents

This section aims to understand how BMOC define and how they value competition. We also asked them to discuss their opportunities to pursue the American Dream, relative to mainstream populations. They talked about their personal talents and abilities and how those helped them compete in life.

Life as a Competition

When asked what competition meant to them, participants described it as being "everywhere," and a part of life. A participant claimed, *"Life's a competition, 'cause you're competing against everyone to do what you want to do."* (01:45:40)

Participants described competition as competing against others for things and as a personal struggle. One African American male gave the example of competing for employment, *"Competing against other people, you going for that job, there's other people going for that job, it's a competition to get that job."* (01:44:26) Another described competition as personal success, *"Competition is just trying to perform at your best so you can get whatever you're going for, whatever you're competing for you're trying to get it so just performing to the best of your abilities."* (01:45:24)

Reaction to Moderator's Statement of the "American Promise"

The moderator read the following statement: If you do certain things in life, if you work hard, if you develop a skill, if you do the right thing, then you get rewards: you get a raise, you get recognition, you get respect. Is that true?

Participants had differing opinions on the Moderator's statement. One male agreed that hard work eventually pays off, *"At the end of the day, if you know you working hard you might take a little bit longer than expected...[if you're] striving for something you're looking forward to, it'll eventually pay off."* (01:47:04) However, another participant felt as though life was unpredictable and could give setbacks even when you're working hard. *"You can be the master of your abilities and have everything working in your favor and things could all come crashing down, that'll knock you out, that'll ruin your whole reality."* (01:47:33)

The Creative Talents of BMOC

Participants listed multiple talents that African-American males excel at including: anything with a ball (sports); rapping; running from the police and analyzing any type of situation. Participants conceded that many of these talents were the result of stereotypes surrounding Black men. One participant explained, *"That's the main stereotype right there, [that] since he's Black, he good at some type of sport, he can probably run fast."* (01:50:30) He added that, *"It's just a lot of stereotypes, everybody ain't the same."* (01:51:21)

Participants also agreed that young Black men excel at several other creative talents. One participant explained that, *"We're the indigenous people, it came from us first, and was patented by everyone else."* (01:51:55)

Participants added that creativity can be beneficial in other life skills, for example, *"It could be cooking, it could be teaching, it could be sweeping, it could be pickin' up some f***ing trash but everything you do is creative, it's all about how you do it."* (01:54:16)

Resources for Enhancing Creative Talents and Skills

When asked where they go to enhance their creative talents and skills, the internet was a popular choice for developing talents and skills, finding jobs, and networking. One participant mentioned that, *"I go online and just go study some pages or something, read Wikipedia."* (01:56:14) As well, a couple of participants said that they use marijuana to enhance their creativity.

Existing Online/Offline Resources for BMOC

In this section BMOC discussed the quantity and quality of resources available to them, both via online/digital tools and in their respective home communities. We also explored whether these resources were helpful in the process of achieving their goals.

Online Resources

When asked for online resources that help them achieve success, responses included: snagajob.com; indeed.com; w3schools.com, and coveredcalifornia.gov. Mobile apps mentioned were: Rap Dictionary; Powdered Toy; Instagram; Zodiac; Ancient Kemetic Word of the Day, and Flipgram.

Type of Mobile App BMOC Wish They Could Have to Help be Successful

When asked what type of app they wished they could have for helping them be successful, participants suggested an app that could, print money, provide job listings and qualifications, and community resources. One participant described his desired app, *"I'd like a job app that would show you that you could actually put your information in, and this is what I want to sign up for and see if I'm eligible to qualify. And if I am, they just hit me right then and there."* (02:03:45)

Another described the benefits of having community resources. *"We need a resource, an app that we can download then it would pop up all of our resources, in the Black community. Somewhere we can go to that's free because most people will go to something that's free."* (02:04:50)

Oakland Focus Group #2
Allen Temple Baptist Church
8501 International Blvd., Oakland, CA 94621

Date: February 24, 2015
 Ethnicity: African-American Males
 Participants: 5 Participants (Average Age: 20 years-old)

Values

This section explores the personal values of low-income urban BMOC and the obstacles they face (real or perceived) in living out those values on a daily basis.

What BMOC Value

Participants were asked to write down their top three values on a note card. Though answers varied, family and education were mentioned consistently as top values. Other responses included: life; generation; integrity; respect; happiness; being equal; giving back to communities; intellect; and respect.

Change in Values Based on Exercise

When given a handout with a list of values and asked to consider them against what they had previously written, all of the participants modified at least one of their selections. All indicated that they had changed their values for broader themes that would encompass their varying ideals. Family, however, remained a top selection. One participant commented, *"I changed giving back to communities, to Integrity. I kind of feel like education can go hand in hand with giving back to communities, by going out and showing others that I can be successful, and get my education, and go to college, and do that so I figured it kind of goes hand in hand."* (01:05:00)

When asked to define family, answers included: immediate relatives; those that you can trust and love; and those who have your best interest at heart. One participant expressed the importance of family as, *"Family, that's yours, no one can take it from you, your grandma is your grandma so I feel like that's the only thing people can't take from you."* (01:07:46)

Where BMOC Get Their Values

When asked where they got their values from, the majority of participants specifically mentioned women in their lives. One participant summed up his influencers as, *"The women pretty much in my life made up the values in me."* (01:09:53) Another explained, *"I feel like I get a lot my values from a lot of the women I've met or talked to in my life because I feel like men in general get a lot of their game from their women...women tend to think outside of the box."* (01:09:26)

Another participant added that his family influences his values, *"I would say my parents and my brothers and sisters like my immediate family, because those are the people I see or I know [that] I can genuinely trust and love and respect and everything... also my grandparents, 'cause they taught me a lot about my history and my culture and stuff like that."* (01:06:45)

Participants were also asked to discuss the importance of spirituality in their lives. Though one participant felt that religion/spirituality was important, most participants expressed skepticism about spirituality and its efficacy in dealing with immediate life problems. As one participant explained, *"Honestly, I can't say spirituality because I feel like the Bible says itself that you go to the Bible when you need it...I may not really need to be discussing with someone something, but I may talk to them anyways, venting for instance. But I may feel like I need to bring that to their attention so that I may not get in trouble or hurt myself or something and the bible may not know how to answer that like a person face-to-face would."* (01:10:30) Another added *"It [spirituality] was in the back of my head but I thought more realistic terms like what really meant value to me."* (01:12:13)

Obstacles to Living What BMOC Value

Participants were asked “what gets in the way from them living what they value?” These African-American males mentioned many different obstacles, including: family death; lack of self-focus; haters/bullies; stress; homelessness; finding happiness; lack of jobs and money; and peer pressure. One participant described the general difficulty in living out values, *“I feel like for anybody anywhere, happiness is hard to occur...There’s somebody always there behind your back breathing on your neck seeking for you to fail so they can feel good. In this society, it’s hard to find happiness. The economy is horrible, in Oakland it’s horrible to try to find a job...and then like to be truly happy you can’t really do that without no money.”* (01:14:10)

Another participant mentioned how his trouble with the law has influenced his life, *“I’ve been on probation since 16. I was a bad kid, so when I got kicked out [the house] it was kind of a wakeup call to me. It made me just kinda want to change stuff. Like change my life.”* (01:13:30)

Success and Optimal Health

This section aims to understand what success looks and feels like to BMOC, and explored what they need to thrive at the level of optimal health (physical, emotional, mental, etc.), rather than merely survive.

The Difference Between Surviving and Thriving

When asked what was the difference between surviving and thriving, participants described surviving as doing the bare minimum to get by. A participant explained, *“I think when you’re homeless that’s survival, when every day is a struggle that’s surviving.”* (01:16:33) Another participant added, *“Survival is barely making it, paycheck to paycheck.”* (1:15:40)

On the other hand, thriving was described as being able to reach goals and be self-sufficient, helping others (family and friends), and having “wiggle room” to do different things in life. He continued, *“Thriving is you being successful, being able to take care of yourself, maybe your kids too if you have them, your loved one and possibly be able to take care of your parents or help out others with your money and your time.”* (01:15:54) One participant explained that thriving is going after what you want. He stated, *“To thrive is to like really go out the box and push for what you want.”* (01:16:20)

BMOC Define Success and Their Exposure to Successful People

Participants were asked how they define success. A couple of participants emphasized money as a key indicator of success. As one mentioned, *“[Success is] people who are rich, people who have money who don’t have to worry about their bills.”* (01:18:06) Others felt that one’s success was defined by happiness and how a person impacted others around them. One male stated, *“I think success is happiness, like if I can look back and I’m happy at the end of the day that’s better than me being wealthy but unhappy.”* (01:18:32) Another added, *“I feel like success is the legacy you can set for yourself or your family, so that when you pass, it’ll be like ‘yeah my grandpa was the one who did this or did that.’”* (01:19:53)

When asked who in their life they considered to be successful, a couple participants revealed that they didn’t know anyone whom they considered successful. Other participants mentioned close relatives who were successful in their careers, education, entrepreneurship and perseverance. One participants felt there were multiple people in his family that he considered successful, *“For me, going back to my great-grandparents, my great-granddad actually helped start this church that we’re in right now...and pretty much all my family members that have gone off to do amazing things and really instill education in all of our family.”* (01:25:35)

What BMOC Need to be Successful

When asked what types of things could help them be successful, participants listed multiple things (both internal and external) that they felt African-American males needed, including: priorities; structure and guidance; mentors; jobs; money; and time and money management. One participant stressed the importance of jobs and money, *“We survive, we don’t have any money, we got to do things to get money and then once we get money we spend it on the wrong things.”* (01:17:10) Mentors were also seen as critical to success. One participant felt that there weren’t enough male mentors, while another described the importance of positive relationships. He stated, *“[We need]*

Adults, or elders, that are willing to connect with people they may not know at all... build a relationship, be really willing to know a person, rather than to pre-judge a person and then just write them off.” (01:17:31) In addition, participants added that having a positive outlook on life, high self-esteem, intellect, and a passion for what you do as beneficial qualities to achieve success.

When asked what holds them back from being the best they can be, one participant mentioned that negative influences and experiences can make a person go against their values. He explained, *“The devil, when I say the devil I don’t mean like a being or a person but just negative things...in some cases people may not be fully aware of their selves or really in control of their self so they just may be easily manipulated by others...rather than reaping the benefits after going the long route and being persistent.” (01:21:38)* Other participants added that procrastination hindered success, *“My problem is that I have all these goals and I have this vision that I see for my life which is all great and I’m working on my goals but not completing them.” (01:22:39)*

The Importance of Respect for BMOC

When asked what respect means to them, in general, participants defined it as a relationship you have with another person and treating others fairly and without judgment. One participant described respect as empathy, *“Respect is empathy. It’s the way you want to be treated. It’s like, however you want to feel, you have to give that same energy to that person.” (01:28:00)* Participants agreed that you have to give respect in order to earn it, as well as have morals and be humble. One participant explained, *“I know this sounds cliché, but just being an overall good person.” (01:29:36)*

When asked who gets respect in America, participants answered: the government; people who are not minorities; the wealthy and people who command respect. Referring to the government, one male explained, *“Because they make all the rules and can’t no one really say anything about it.” (01:28:27)*

When asked if there was a difference with what it takes to earn respect from peers as opposed to the community as a whole, participants felt there was little. However, several participants felt that it is more difficult to earn respect in school and work settings because of established power structures. One participant explained, *“They talk to you any kind of way because they’re paying you.” (01:30:53)* When asked if young Black men get enough respect, participants felt that they did not.

BMOC Define Optimal Health

When asked what it meant to be healthy, most participants focused primarily on terms related to physical and mental health, such as: eating well; exercising; not stressing; going for regular check-ups; and gaining knowledge and feeding your mind.

When asked what it would feel like to be at the top of their game, participants listed ways that being at the top of their game could help them in life. One participant described it as being on top of the world, *“I’d be able to do anything without even having to worry about it.” (01:35:02)* A lack of education and time were seen as hinders to success, *“Time doesn’t wait for anybody, so even when you feel tired you got to get your rest so that’s time you’re wasting away right there that you’re not making money or moving one step closer to our goal...if I want to hang out with my friends, that wasting time, I should be doing something with my time that’s productive or constructive.” (01:36:07)*

Competition/Winning/Skills and Creative Talents

This section aims to understand how BMOC define and how they value competition. We also asked them to discuss their opportunities to pursue the American Dream, relative to mainstream populations. They talked about their personal talents and abilities and how those helped them compete in life.

Life as a Competition

When asked what competition meant to them, participants stated that it meant competing against others for resources. Participants agreed that competition was a part of life. One participant stated, *"It's a rat race, especially in the USA. We are all bred to think like capitalists...don't help anyone else, you've got to get there before the next man or else that spot's taken. That's how you're taught and bred to think."* (01:40:50) Another male described how everyone wants to be "the man" without a hard work ethic, *"Good work ethic is underrated and stupidity is overrated."* (01:42:46)

In order to enhance their opportunity to succeed, participants mentioned listening to elders, learning every day, having goals, and skill development.

Reaction to Moderator's Statement of the "American Promise"

The moderator read the following statement: If you do certain things in life, if you work hard, if you develop a skill, if you do the right thing, then you get rewards: you get a raise, you get recognition, you get respect. Is that true?

Most participants reacted negatively to the statement, indicating that it was unrealistic. One participant stated, *"It sounds like the cliché American Dream, that's what they said back in the day... it's not true."* (01:44:15) Another expressed his frustration, *"You come out, there's no work place to put your degree to use...I talk a lot about education and how important that is but at the same time let's be realistic, can it really help?"* (01:46:38) Participants expressed that having connections and family resources helps to achieve success.

The Creative Talents of BMOC

Participants were asked what being creative and talented meant to them. Participants felt being creative was how you express yourself, while being talented was something that was more God-given. Participants stated that in addition to the stereotypical creative talents of sports and music, African-American males also excel at many other skills and professions. A participant stated, *"I was actually reading an article and it said there's like 12,000 African-American athletes that play professionally in the US and there are like eight times more lawyers, twelve times more doctors and stuff like that...it's just the media that makes it seem like that's all we can do."* (01:52:27)

One participant noted that creativity is not only associated with skills and professions, but that in some instances people have to creativity just to survive day to day. He stated, *"You've got to be creative when you're homeless because you've always got to figure out what you're about to eat, where you're about to go, where you're about to sleep, or how you're gonna make money. That's the kind of the position I'm in. I feel like I'm being creative every day."* (01:53:45)

Resources for Enhancing Creative Talents and Skills

Participants were asked what resources they used to enhance their creative talents and skills. Participants listed a number of ways, including: self-reflection; life experiences; interacting with different environments (e.g., neighborhoods); open mic nights; practicing sports and social media. A participant stated how he used an app to stay up-to-date and relevant with his talents. *"My passion is basketball and training. I go to Flipboard...it's tailored to you. They give you a list of interests and you click the interest you have and every day they give you stuff about your interest."* (01:58:48)

Several participants agreed that enhancing their creative talents could help them achieve their goals and succeed in life. Participants said they weren't aware of any resources that were specifically for young Black men.

Existing Online/Offline Resources for BMOC

In this section BMOC discussed the quantity and quality of resources available to them, both via online/digital tools and in their respective home communities. We also explored whether these resources were helpful in the process of achieving their goals.

Online Resources

When asked for online resources that help them achieve success, responses included: Google, Wikipedia and Tumblr. The mobile app, Flipboard, was mentioned again.

Type of Mobile App BMOC Wish They Could Have to Help be Successful

When asked what type of mobile app they wished they could have for helping them be successful, one participant described an all-inclusive app that would make their day-to-day life more efficient and teach them about money management. He explained, *"[I want] an app that taught me how or what stocks to invest in, connected me to my alarm system at home, allowed me to unlock my car without having to use my key, taught me about money management and time management, all in one. And it could give information on healthy food and exercise spots and locations where I could go clubbing at and stuff like that."* (02:05:03)

Another participant desired a how-to-app that could help them with employment and career planning. He stated, *"I want a how-to app. Like if I wanted a certain job it'd be an app that would tell me how to do that job, or what I've got to do to get that job. You could type in what the job is, and then you could search it, and then it would pull up what you need to do to get the job, the degrees you need, the schooling, and all of that and it would lay it out for you."* (02:06:53)

Offline Resources

When asked for resources in their community that help them enhance or develop their skills, responses included: the YMCA and gym; people and networking; school and job training programs and mentorship programs. A participant at an alternative school explained how his school helped him. *"Our school helps us with different types of stuff. They help with housing and after four months of going there they give you a job. But on top of that you're getting a high school diploma and on top of that you're getting an AmeriCorps scholarship. And you're getting trained in stuff that people don't get trained in, you're doing a whole bunch of stuff."* (02:08:40)

Another participant described a faith-based mentorship program called Urban Mentors that taught him life skills and exposed him to new things and new places. Another faith-based program was mentioned as well. A participant stated, *"There was something called 'The Brotherhood'... it was all [African-American] men. It's like bible study but we do talk about current events, where we can go for help for work, anything you're seeking out that you may need."* (02:11:05)

One participant felt that there were no resources in his community. *"I say hell no. I live in West Oakland. They got like 3 things that may be useful in West Oakland. They got a high school, a clinic, they have a BART. They got three things and that's all."* (02:11:44)

Bronx Focus Group
Madison Square Boys & Girls Club, Inc.
543 East 189th Street, Bronx, NY 10458

Date: April 7, 2015
 Ethnicity: African-American Males
 Participants: 5 Participants (Average Age: 22 years-old)

Values

This section aimed to better understand the values of low-income urban BMOC and the obstacles they face...real or perceived.

What BMOC Value

Participants were asked to write down their top three values on a note card. Though answers varied, family was mentioned by all participants as a top value. Other responses included: God, good health, money, happiness, education, career/employment, loyalty and drive to succeed.

Change in Values Based on Exercise

When given a handout with a list of values and asked to consider them against what they had previously written, family remained a top value, but four of the participants modified at least one of their selections. They indicated that they had changed their values for broader themes that would encompass their more specific values. One participant commented, *"For me, what I have changed... for the first one I had education and career. So I changed that to being successful. My definition of being successful includes education and career. It ties in to being successful."* (01:06:02)

When asked to define family, answers included: immediate relatives or those who helped you become who you are. One participant expressed what family meant to him, *"For me the definition of family isn't the people you were born into because you could be from a whole other family. You could be adopted and know those people as family...Family is who helped you become who you are or helping you become who you will be."* (01:07:45)

Where BMOC Get Their Values

When asked where they got their values from, participants mentioned family, their neighborhood and life lessons. One participant explained how he got his values from his neighborhood, *"I look at the negativity in my neighborhood and try to be positive. I want to be different from everybody else, in a positive way."* (01:08:30) Another discussed life lessons, *"I feel that life teaches you values, cause things change, people change. We are a constantly changing society."* (01:09:58)

Participants were asked to discuss why more of them hadn't mentioned God or spirituality as a value. One explained, *"I didn't put religion or God because when looking at religions as a whole, not a specific one, they all say the same thing they just have a different way of going about it. And if there is a different way of going about it then I don't know which way is the right way to choose so I won't subjugate myself."* (01:10:58) All but one participant stated that they considered themselves spiritual and not religious. One explained, *"I consider myself more spiritual than religious. I believe in God but I don't follow everything to the book."* (01:12:24) One participant claimed he was neither spiritual or religious because to him it was a confusing concept.

Obstacles to Living What BMOC Value

Participants were asked what gets in the way from them living what they value. These African American males mentioned many different obstacles, including: family issues; finances; and procrastination. One participant described how procrastination can impact living your values, *"One of my values was 'drive to succeed.' If you're not driven to succeed and you're procrastinating, that's blocking a value. You can't get anywhere if you're not driven to do it."* (01:14:55) Another participant agreed, *"As a college student, everything you just said resonates with me. Procrastination is a deadly thing. When you wait till the last minute to do something and you're cramming then it might not come out the best. Then you look back at all the time you had to do it."* (01:15:20) When asked why they

procrastinate, participants listed multiple reasons, such as: a skewed sense of time causing one to believe they have more time than they really do; lack of motivation; and life's responsibilities.

Success and Optimal Health

This section aimed to understand how BMOC defined success and understand what they need in order to thrive.

The Difference Between Surviving and Thriving

When asked what was the difference between surviving and thriving, participants described surviving as doing enough to get by while thriving was "having an abundance," "living comfortably without any worries" and "being in good health." A participant summed up the difference in his eyes, *"To me it's kind of like the same thing between living and being alive. Like some people are just alive, but they're not really living. People who have existential crisis, people who don't understand who they are or what their purpose is in life- suddenly surviving is just like 'I'm here, but just at the bare minimum.' or 'I'm just scraping by.' As opposed to thriving which is when your needs are met and your wants are being fulfilled."* (01:20:08)

When asked what Black males in their community need to move from surviving to thriving, participants suggested motivation, focus, more information, expand your horizon or resources and being around people wanting to do positive things. One participant explained further, *"I feel you would need motivation and information. You got people that just be on the block, they're just there. They need to be motivated to get out of there, move, get some information. This is the information age...With the access to information that we have right now where it is in our pockets, all we have to do is be motivated to look for it."* (01:25:15) Another participant agreed as he referenced searching for jobs, *"I believe they have the resources, but they use it in the wrong way. We have technology in our hands, and can use LinkedIn for networking but people would rather go on to social media for other reasons. That's what makes us [young black males] different from others."* (01:26:47)

BMOC Exposure to Successful People

When asked who in their life they considered to be successful, a couple participants mentioned a family member like a cousin or sister. *"I'd say my sister is successful. She's a single mother, and she was able to get a college degree, a full time job working as a librarian, and she handles all this responsibility, she always puts her child first, she provides for her child, puts food on the table."* (01:38:24)

What BMOC Need to be Successful

When asked what holds them back from being the best they can be, the majority of participants expressed that it was primarily a fear of failure. One participant explained, *"I don't like to be wrong. I don't like to be so passionate about something to find out it was vain, wrong, stupid or a lie. I personally have to dig deep into something before I fully commit myself to it or else I wind up looking stupid, whether it's school or even a woman...It ties into that fear of failure. If I fail, what am I going to do next?"* (01:30:53) Another participant agreed, *"For me it's the fear of failure. I try to do things I know I can do, or know I can get. I don't wanna do something and get let down, I'm tired of being let down. Like if I know I'm qualified for a certain job, I would go for that job. I wouldn't try to reach beyond that job because I don't want to be let down at the end and not get it. A lot of times, constant disappointments can make you not wanna try no more."* (01:32:09) Another participant followed up, *"I agree with him, basically being scared of failure. I would try my best, but I'd be so scared of failure, it would stop me at a certain point to going beyond my full potential."* (01:32:50)

Later in the group, a participant mentioned a fear of failure again, stating *"I worry about failure at times. I tend to do something at my full potential, and I'm just worried that I just might fail, and what's going to be my fallback plan? What's going to be my plan B?"* (01:51:02)

The Importance of Respect for BMOC

When asked what respect means to them, in general, participants defined it as looking at people as equals and understanding that everyone is valuable. One participant explained, *“I feel like respect is when you look at another human being and realize that you are both made of the same thing: blood, flesh and bone; and you can look at each other equally. If you are looking down at someone you are degrading them. If you are looking up at someone then you are idolizing them. Respect is looking at someone equally.”* (01:39:05) Another stated, *“To me, respect is the understanding that everyone is valuable. No matter what that person may think, whatever that person may feel or say. Whatever values they hold, you understand it and you acknowledge it. With respect comes a level of understanding towards another human being, and I think understanding is the bottom line. We might be different or we might be the same. But the basic fact that you’re a human being, you have a right to life, you have a right to be treated as such. You have a right to being respected. That’s what respect is.”* (01:40:17)

When asked who gets respect in America, participants felt that only white people get respect. One participant elaborated on that feeling. *“We [Black people] are the most disrespected people on the planet if you ask me. Black men and women are disrespected. I mean we disrespect our women as much as everybody else does. I think black people as a whole, even Latin people, Native people get more respect. We’re the most disrespected people on the planet. I think only white people get respect in this country. Maybe even sometimes people from other nations because they come here, set up shop, and even sometimes kiss the white man’s ass, and they get more respect than we’ll ever get.”* (01:41:25)

BMOC Define Optimal Health

When asked what it meant to be healthy, most participants focused primarily on terms related to physical and mental health, such as: physical activity; low stress level; healthy diet; and high self-esteem.

When asked what it would feel like to be at the top of their game, participants used terms like *“not having to worry”* and it *“feels like I’m not even trying, things fall into place.”* One participant described a time in high school when he felt he was at his best. He stated, *“I remember a time in high school when I was definitely on the top of my game, so I’m just going to go off of that frame of reference. Everything that I did turned out to be the best that I put forward. It came with a level of success. I was doing well in school, me and my ex at the time, we were on a great level of intimacy, respect, love, and understanding, and it just felt like everything at that point, like I didn’t have to worry about certain things, certain things just came naturally. Like I said I was putting my best foot forward in just about everything I did, and it came to be a success. That’s the level I’m trying to get back to.”* (01:47:35)

The mention of “not having to worry” when on the top of their game sparked a conversation where the participants were asked if worrying was something prevalent in their lives. The participants unanimously agreed that worrying was an emotion they were very familiar with in their day-to-day lives. One explained, *“Waking up in the morning, I worry about like, what’s going to happen today? Who am I going to lose today, or am I gonna get locked up today? Different things like just getting dressed and walking out the house before the day starts.”* (01:52:04) Another participant piggy-backed on that comment *“You know it’s a problem when you wake up in the morning, you think you can dress normal, but you have to worry about ‘do I look like a threat to anybody, or do I look suspicious, or do I look like I’m going to cause some trouble?’ For me, ‘am I going to make it home tonight?’ that’s my number one fear.”* (01:52:24) Another participant agreed, *“sometimes I worry about simple things like, ‘am I going to make it home tonight?’”* (01:51:30)

When asked if there were any local resources available to them to help them live a healthy life, participants mentioned that they were aware of some, but accessing them was difficult due to expenses, particularly for medical care and healthy food.

Competition/Winning/Skills and Creative Talents

This section aims to understand how BMOC define and how they value competition. We also asked them to discuss their opportunities to pursue the American Dream, relative to mainstream populations. They talked about their personal talents and abilities and how those helped them compete in life.

Life as a Competition

When asked what competition meant to them, participants stated that it meant competing against anything and everything. Two participants felt that life was a competition. One participant stated, *"Life in America is a competition. This country is a giant business; it's a well-oiled machine. In this country, especially with capitalism, the point is to step on whoever's neck you've got to in order to get ahead. There is no such thing as free lunch. Everything that you got, costs somebody else. Our people, we're behind everybody. Everybody got a 40 mile head start and we gotta sprint, just to catch up. So I'd say over here, in America, it is a competition."* (01:57:40)

Others were hesitant to look at life as a competition because it meant someone would have to lose. One participant preferred to describe it as motivation. He explained, *"There are certain people that are ahead. People that I look up too. People like Jay-Z and Puff Daddy. I want to be in their shoes but I don't feel like I'm competing against them. They are more of a motivation."* (01:59:10)

Reaction to Moderator's Statement

The moderator read the following statement: If you do certain things in life, if you work hard, if you develop a skill, if you do the right thing, then you get what? Participants finished the statement with comments such as: *"an opportunity to shine;" "the American Dream;" "whatever your definition of success is;" "success;" and "comfort."*

The moderator read the statement again, but added to the ending: If you do certain things in life, if you work hard, if you develop a skill, if you do the right thing, then you get rewards...you get a raise...you get recognition...you get respect. All the participants except one felt that the statement was true. The one who didn't comment stated, *"The reason I don't feel you get success from that is because, you could be doing all that, just to get to the next step. You haven't succeeded; you just took two steps forward. You gotta put in hard work to get anywhere. If you add "hard work over time," that narrows it down better."* (02:01:36)

When asked how they were preparing to succeed, participants mentioned *"networking," "getting an education," and "staying focus."*

The Creative Talents of BMOC

Participants were asked what being creative and talented meant to them. Participants tended to agree that it meant being able to express yourself through an outlet; however, one participant put his own twist to it. *"Creativeness is the ability to bring forth, whether it's a material, an idea, a movement or anything like that. It comes from within, and your ability to bring it forth. Talent is the ability to harbor that ability to bring forth. Your talent is what makes you skilled in that ability to bring something forth, your creativeness."* (02:04:58)

Participants felt that African-American males can excel at anything and everything they put the effort into.

Resources for Enhancing Creative Talents and Skills

Participants were asked what resources they used to enhance their creative talents and skills. Participants listed three primary ways: talking with others with similar skills; self-reflection; and practice. Participants said they felt there were resources that were specifically for young black men; however, they weren't sure where to find them.

Existing Online/Offline Resources for BMOC

This section aimed to understand what online and offline resources BMOC access and what resources they want.

Online Resources

When asked for online resources that help them achieve success, only one participant stated that they searched online. One participant mentioned that he went online in order to identify places in the community. *"When I go online to find information, I try to find places that are physical that I can go to get the information. Because things online can be changed at will."* (02:12:19)

Type of Mobile App BMOC Wish They Could Have to Help be Successful

When asked what type of mobile app they wished they could have for helping them be successful, one participant said he needed something versatile. He explained, *“I would need it to be versatile, a versatile kind of place. Not only set to one person’s desire, somewhere that anyone can go to no matter what kind of community you’re a part of. If you have a desire and a drive to do something they can help point you in that direction, they can help give you information you may be looking for, they can help you fine tune whatever it is you came in to do. Just a place that gets you there.”* (02:14:50)

Offline Resources

When asked for resources in their community that help them enhance or develop their skills, participants didn’t name many specific locations. One participant mentioned that he didn’t like any places in his neighborhood because he felt that too many of the negative issues in the community filtered into the facility. *“In relation to places I have access to, there are places that have specific points or mission, but when I think about my own neighborhood, I personally don’t trust it. In the area of the place, the place has been pulled into the mass of the area. Whatever the area is like, a lot of times you’ll see this “safe place” being dragged into that area, that lifestyle. That’s what I don’t trust. If it’s supposed to be a place to better myself despite where I am or where I’m from, I don’t want to be reminded inside that space, while I’m trying to work on me, where it is.”* (02:18:15)

Baltimore Focus Group
Youth Advocates Programs, Inc.
1 N. Charles Street, Suite #1100, Baltimore, MD 21201

Date: April 9, 2015
 Ethnicity: African-American Males
 Participants: 5 Participants (Average Age: 23 years-old)

Values

This section aimed to better understand the values of low-income urban BMOC and the obstacles they face...real or perceived.

What BMOC Value

Participants were asked to write down their top three values on a note card. Though answers varied, family was mentioned by all participants as a top value. Money or something indirectly related to money (financially stable and career) was mentioned by all but one participant. Other responses included: life, success, brother and God.

When asked to define family, answers included: whoever is in my household, immediate family and a generation of people. One participant expressed how he looked at family holistically, *"When I say family I'm speaking about a whole generation, a whole race, not just me. Even if you're not my direct family, but I can do something to help you out then you're still my family...We are all in this one world so everyone is a family."* (01:16:05)

Change in Values Based on Exercise

When given a handout with a list of values and asked to consider them against what they had previously written, four of the participants had no changes to their top three values while one changed all three of their top values. One explained his changes, *"A lot of things have happened to me in the last few weeks, so I chose survival because it's hard for a young Black male to survive in these streets these days. Money because you need money to make it. And being successful because I want to get a job, start a family, things of that nature."* (01:04:38)

Where BMOC Get Their Values

When asked where they got their values from, participants mentioned life lessons and family. One participant explained, *"My values come from life in general. Just living and going through every day experiences."* (01:06:40) Another added, *"I think you go off of how your parents raised you, but once you go out, things change. I think it changes from day to day, it just depends on where you are in your life and how close you are to who you are inside."* (01:06:49) Another participant explained how his daughter influenced his values. *"I get my values from my daughter because without her I would still be continuing to just focus on myself. But with her about to be here it has helped me to keep moving forward and to be strong."* (01:07:47)

Only one participant mentioned God as a value, so other participants were asked to discuss why more of them hadn't mentioned God or spirituality as well. One explained, *"I feel as though spirituality don't get you nowhere."* (01:08:26) Another stated, *"Everything now a days is physical. My thing is if I can't see it, if I don't know what it is, if I can't reach out and touch it, it doesn't affect me. It doesn't have a feeling to me. So that spiritual feeling, I can't really connect with unless it's hands on. Right now spirituality is not a part of my life."* (01:08:31) The one participant that mentioned God elaborated, *"The reason I say spirituality is the most important thing is because there's an inner being and there's a spiritual aura around you. And if you have bad, negative energy and you're around all this bad stuff, bad things will come to you. If you around good things, I think the good things will come to you...it's all about your mind."* (01:10:46)

Obstacles to Living What BMOC Value

Participants were asked what gets in the way of them living what they value, specifically what stands in the way of getting money. One participant explained that what is keeping him from getting money is the fact that he chose a more positive path than some of his friends in the hood. *"I chose money as a value, but mine is on the way. I'm a college student so I'm being patient about my money. All my friends are drug dealers or stuck in the hood; I'm the only one to move out the hood and go on and go to college. So, I'm being patient with my money but it's still important to me. So going to college is what's getting in the way of my money right now."* (01:11:50) Another felt that nothing was stopping his money and reiterated that things take time, *"Nothing happens overnight. You can get a job and go to work but you're not getting a paycheck that day. For me personally, nothing is stopping my money...There is money to be made each and every day. There is something called a hustle. It's how you survive in the street each and every day. So if you are self-determined and want to make money, all you gotta do is get up and go out there."* (01:13:50)

Another participant explained how the negative people you hang around with can be an obstacle because anything they do can come back to impact you.

Success and Optimal Health

This section aimed to understand how BMOC defined success and understand what they need in order to thrive.

The Difference Between Surviving and Thriving

When asked what the difference between surviving and thriving was, participants expressed distinct differences between the two. A participant summed up the difference in his eyes, *"I think surviving is just doing whatever just to make sure you come out on top or stay alive. It depends on where you're at in your life. Thriving, I think that's like a self-motivational thing. If you thrive to make money like he said, you're going to make money. There's nothing gonna stop you. Some people need to be motivated, some people don't."* (01:17:49) Another stated, *"Surviving is going through the motions, letting time pass. You eat just to eat, you drink water just to drink water. Thriving is 'ok, I'm gonna eat because this is going to make me healthy' That's that thrive, that's the thrive kicking in. I'm going to work because I want that money. Surviving is 'I'm just going to get these food stamps cause it's free.'" (01:18:25)* Another participant felt that those people that are thriving, are those that constantly want more. *"I describe it as accepting less instead of wanting more...People who are surviving, they accept what's handed to them, they accept the handouts. People who thrive, they don't accept handouts."* (01:20:20)

When asked what Black males in their community need to move from surviving to thriving, participants suggested they needed support, a new mindset and need to know where they come from. One participant explained, *"They need to start viewing everyone as family. If it was a broader family, if we had a broader family that actually would come in and help us and be committed to it, and not just doing it because you get paid for it, but are really committed to it because you care, that would change a lot."* (01:21:09) The same participant followed up that comment and explained, *"We need to know our history and heritage. That plays a big impact on yourself confidence and how you view yourself."* (01:24:15)

Another participant stated, *"Basically I think they need the support. They just need support. If you don't got nobody backing you, I know he said he's been on his own since he was 13, but if no one ever gave him an opportunity, he'd probably be in the same place as everybody else. So you need that support, someone that's gonna pick you up when you down."* (01:25:08)

Another participant explained how young Black males need to adjust the way they think and stop living strictly in the moment. *"I think for people to change we don't need anyone outside of us. I think it all starts with us. We listen to this stupid music nowadays. We are worried about fashion, but no one is worried about getting a car...I think as kids we need to change the way we live and think. The average Black person wants to be famous, but you gotta want more. You got to want to be who you are and do something positive."* (01:22:44)

BMOG Exposure to Successful People

Participants were asked how they define success and provided definitions such as: being able to provide for yourself and family, and having family, friends and supporters.

When asked who in their life they considered to be successful, one participant mentioned his mentor, two mentioned their mothers and one mentioned their baby's mother. *"I would say my baby mother. She had a hard upbringing, and she didn't have the best relationship with her mother, and her father was in and out so. At a point in her life she was alone, and she made something out of nothing. I definitely tip my hat off to her. She actually runs her own business, so pretty much she owns her own business. She makes good money for herself."* (01:33:35)

One participant claimed to not know anyone who was successful because he felt there was no one that had achieved success. When asked if there was anyone in his family he could consider successful, he mentioned his brothers who both have jobs, are financial stable, take care of their families and give back.

What BMOG Need to be Successful

When asked what holds them back from being the best they can be, the majority of participants expressed that it was primarily procrastination. One participant explained, *"I say I'll do something, and I might put it off a day, and that day turn into a week, and then that week turn into a month, then it's like a month and a half down the line and it's like 'dang...I shoulda did that!'"* (01:33:56)

The Importance of Respect for BMOG

When asked what respect means to them, in general, participants defined it as the way you hold yourself or being able to accept everyone for who they are. One participant explained, *"I view respect as when you're able to hold your head up high, you're able to walk with confidence, you don't feel down on yourself, you just got that energy. You just feel respected. Respect comes and goes, you gotta give it to get it. So first you gotta respect yourself."* (01:37:32) Another stated, *"I think respect is being able to accept everyone and their flaws. Because if you respect the person no matter what they look like, no matter where they come from and then you accept them for what they is then there can be no disrespect."* (01:40:17)

When asked who gets respect in America, one participant felt that everyone gets both respected and disrespected. Another disagreed and felt that Black men only get respect if they are *"coons who forgot where they came from or they are dudes that just want to fall in with the crowd."* Another felt that it comes down to levels of respect. He explained, *"Where we came from as Black people, from being in slavery and segregation, without the Caucasians respecting some of us we would still be in segregation. We wouldn't be able to have the support that we do now and be able to thrive."* (01:41:37) One participant felt that real Black men get respect. He elaborated, *"If you're a real Black man and know what a real Black man is then you will get respect. A real Black man is not out on the corners selling drugs. So you can't say that I'm being disrespected. No you're disrespecting your whole community by being out there selling drugs. So a real Black man that is focused, working, taking care of his family, you're going to be respected. But if you out there portraying what a Black man isn't supposed to be, then that is when the disrespect will happen."* (01:42:04)

When asked directly if they felt young Black males got respect, all the participants stated "no." One participant elaborated on his feelings regarding who he considered young Black males (11 – 19 year-olds). *"We are all from the same generation. That generation that comes after us, they are the ones you consider 'young Black teenage males.' But they are after us. That's where the problem starts. They don't even have respect for themselves to begin to have anyone else respect them. They have no guidance. They have no Big Momma."* (01:44:45) Other participants agreed, using terms like, *"it's too late for them," "they are gone," "it's a totally different ball game," "they don't get the ole fashion ass-whooping"* and *"they grow up too fast"* to describe teenage Black males.

BMOG Define Optimal Health

When asked what it meant to be healthy, most participants focused primarily on terms related to physical and mental health, such as: working out and mind, body and soul.

Competition/Winning/Skills and Creative Talents

This section aims to understand how BMOC define and how they value competition. We also asked them to discuss their opportunities to pursue the American Dream, relative to mainstream populations. They talked about their personal talents and abilities and how those helped them compete in life.

Life as a Competition

When asked what competition meant to them, participants used terms like *“rivalry”* *“two people going after the same goal”* and *“motivation, cause competition motivates you.”* When asked if they felt life was a competition, one participant responded, *“I don’t think a competition of life is for anybody else but yourself. Cause you’ve got to do what you have to do for yourself. But in a way, I would say it’s a competition cause there’s people that’s rich, people that’s middle class, people that’s low class. So yeah I guess it’s a competition.”* (01:51:29) Another added, *“Every day you are battling to live. Nobody leaves their house one day and be like ‘I’m embracing death,’ you trying to fight it and do whatever you gotta do to make sure you’re still make it to the next day and so on and so forth.”* (01:51:49)

Participants discussed how if life is a competition they were competing against time and all the negative influences in society. One participant explained, *“I think we are competing against the devil, but to me the devil is not spirituality. To me, the devil is all negative things. If you smoke, that’s the devil. Temptation, that’s the devil. Things that keep you from moving on and are deterring your focus.”* (01:52:38)

Reaction to Moderator’s Statement

The moderator read the following statement: If you do certain things in life, if you work hard, if you develop a skill, if you do the right thing, then you get what? Participants finished the statement with comments such as: *“a bigger challenge;”* *“success;”* *“rewarded;”* and *“ups and down.”*

The moderator read the statement again, but added to the ending: If you do certain things in life, if you work hard, if you develop a skill, if you do the right thing, then you get rewards...you get a raise...you get recognition...you get respect. The participants felt that the statement was not necessarily always true. One participant commented, *“I think there are two sides of the bread, there is the burnt side and course side. I think that if you do all of those things, you might not get everything. Then there are some people for where that’s the flip side. They do everything and they get recognized.”* (01:57:22)

The Creative Talents of BMOC

Participants were asked what being creative and talented meant to them. Participants used phrases like *“something you are naturally good at”* and *“God-given.”*

When participants were asked what African-American males excel at, one participant stated *“sports”* and *“selling drugs.”* Another responded, *“I’m going to say whatever it is you’re good at because a lot of people look at our generation like ‘oh yeah, you put a black man in sports and he’s gonna kill you. If you put him in something like swimming he’s gonna die but you put him on a court and he’s gonna do good.’ See, I think that’s very in the box. We’re put to limitations. I just think that if you go out and explore different things, then you find out you are much more capable than doing just what somebody has presented to you.”* (02:00:28)

When asked what their creative talents were, participants mentioned: *“Musically gifted,”* *“making beats,”* *“sports/music/school,”* *“football/boxing,”* and *“sing/dance/poetry.”* Participants felt that their talents could make them successful, but that they have to be persistent and sell themselves. A participant explained, *“You have to promote yourself. You have to be persistent. If you have a talent, and you know you can take it a step further, you gotta be on top of that. Nothing is going to come to you. It can, but you could fuck around and wait 50 years for something to come to you, as opposed to that same year, you could put in all that work effort and obtain it yourself.”* (02:04:32)

Resources for Enhancing Creative Talents and Skills

Participants were asked what resources they used to enhance their creative talents and skills. Participants listed three primary ways: searching the Internet; read books; and practice.

Existing Online/Offline Resources for BMOC

This section aimed to understand what online and offline resources BMOC access and what resources they want.

Online Resources

When asked for online resources or apps that help them achieve success, participants stated that they didn't really use the internet for achieving success. One participant stated, *"Smartphones make a lot of apps that don't have anything to do with certain people. Smartphones main focus is the kids, not the grownups. Most every app on there is a game, not something educational. The most we use an app for is downloading music."* (02:14:38)

Type of Mobile App BMOC Wish They Could Have to Help be Successful

When asked what type of mobile app they wished they could have for helping them become successful, one participant said he needed an employment app. He explained, *"I need a job app where I can go in there, and it'll say you can go to an interview today, or schedule an interview. I don't want it where you're just telling me the job is hiring and when you call they say 'We're not hiring anymore.' That's the ideal app that I want, something that actually helps you get a job within a week."* (02:16:04) Another participant suggested an app for aspiring entrepreneurs. *"I would make an entrepreneurial app. Just for the simple fact that I want to own my own business. So I'd have people on there, like mini documentaries with successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurs, just to see how they made it or how they were successful, or with the ones that wasn't, what they did wrong."* (02:17:17)

Another participant who boxed wanted an app he could use for physical training, *"I'd say a training app. Because like, some things that I learn are helping, but it's not really helping me go to the next level. It's keeping me the same so I need something that gets me going up, up, up."* (02:16:55) Another suggested an app that allows you to patent your creative ideas.

**Atlanta Focus Group
Atlanta Technical College
Brenda Watts Jones - Allied Health Building
1560 Metropolitan Parkway, Room H-223, Atlanta, GA 30310-4446**

Date: May 6, 2015
 Ethnicity: African-American Males
 Participants: 5 Participants (Average Age: 20 years-old)

Values

This section aimed to better understand the values of low-income urban BMOC and the obstacles they face...real or perceived.

What BMOC Value

Participants were asked to write down their top three values on a note card. Though answers varied, family was mentioned by all participants as a top value. Other responses included: God, money, loyalty, career, education and a positive life.

Change in Values Based on Exercise

When given a handout with a list of values and asked to consider them against what they had previously written, family remained a top value, but three of the participants modified one of their selections. They indicated that they had changed their values to things that better represented the way they felt: *“positive life to living stress free,” “loyalty to trustworthiness,”* and *“respect to respect from others.”* When asked by the moderator to add one more value from the list, the participants stated: *“surviving and being strong,” “morals and integrity,” “healthy body and happiness,” “happiness,”* and *“living stress free.”*

When asked to define family, participants explained how family was more than blood to them and it was about the relationship with the person. Each participant stated that they had people in their life they considered family who were not blood relatives. One participant explained, *“Well, when I say family, I look at it like, through bloodline, and line as far as the relationship I have with the person because, you don’t even have to be my blood family but you can still be my family. It’s all about how much respect you’ve got for that person, and how much they’ve got for you.”* (01:06:12) One participant expressed how important some of his friends are to him, *“I’d jump in front of a bullet for them. I’ve got friends that I’ve known since I came out of the hospital. Grew up with, went to school, did everything with. No doubt, they are probably more family than my actual blood.”* (01:07:10)

The two participants that had mentioned God as being important to them were asked to elaborate on if they were referring to spirituality or religion. One participant stated, *“I kind of distinguish between the two, and by God I don’t necessarily mean someone’s religion because personally I don’t have a set religion; I’m agnostic even though my family is originally Baptist. When I say God I mean I believe there’s a higher power. That’s what keeps me going, like, whatever this universe has to offer me, whoever’s the one that created us, they have a plan set for me and as long as I believe in that plan I can get through anything.”* (01:07:54) The other participant added, *“Yeah I definitely think there’s a difference between religion and spirituality. I’m actually a religion major in college. So when I say god I actually mean the spiritual aspect, because the religious aspect is more of the doctrine and man-made construct of it all.”* (01:08:24) Another participant that described himself as spiritual felt that some people focus on religion because they need it to get through life. *“I think why people be more religious than spiritual is because, maybe the religion, like, keeps them sane. It’s the only thing keeping them motivated to do the right thing.”* (01:11:16)

Where BMOC Get Their Values

When asked where they got their values from, the younger participants mentioned family, while their older counterparts also mentioned life experiences. One younger participant explained how he got his values from his parents, *"I have to give it to my parents, like both my mom and my dad, both of them were there in the house with me happily married, and they took care of me and they showed me the best way to be in life, like to grow up and be something, don't just be out here being nothing."* (01:14:30) Another added, *"My mom and my dad. Even though my Dad wasn't there for a short period of time, or really a long period, but he still was there. He wasn't in the house, but he was there. He told us no matter how far we went, if my Mom decided to take us to Canada, he'd find us regardless and still be there. And he's kept that promise. So, my dad, my older brother stopped being a knucklehead a few years ago, buckled down and went to college and now he's trying to get us to do the same thing. So it's like my Mom, Dad, and oldest brother; that's where I get my core values from."* (01:15:15) One of the older participants stated, *"I would say my experiences, I can't necessarily give that to a person, but through the experiences I might share with that person or just personal experiences. But I don't want to reduce it to saying just my mom or just my dad gave it to me because it's an accumulation of all the different experiences."* (01:15:48)

Obstacles to Living What BMOC Value

Participants were asked what gets in the way from them living what they value. These African-American males mentioned some different obstacles, including: their neighborhood; education; personal stress; and temptation. One participant described his neighborhood as *"people acting like crabs in a bucket."* (01:17:43) Another participant discussed the issues in his neighborhood, *"I have to agree with Robert down here about the neighborhoods, like from where you grew up at to where you grow up now, it's like you really can't have anything anymore. We moved out of a recent place...it was in a month, 22 break-ins, 20 TVs stole...It's like, we can't have nothin nice. The village ain't raising the kids."* (01:19:42) Yet another added, *"I grew up in a very, very stressful neighborhood. I grew up in between Bloods, Crips, and MS-13s. So there were some days, walking to school, I had to wear a certain color just to get through different neighborhoods, or get a ride from my friend, or jump on the bus. I couldn't trust nobody, because I was afraid of getting jumped or robbed or something."* (01:22:40) He added that education was also an obstacle for him, *"You know when I said education, that's one of my biggest stresses because, coming from California and moving out here, there are some things that people learned out here, that you would just learn in California in high school, that they learned in middle school. Everything's a lot different; it's really just where you grew up at, and how you let it go."* (01:23:17)

One participant described how stress gets in the way for him, *"I kind of stress out a little bit because of my younger family members. I'm the first one to go straight from high school to college so I'm always trying to inspire and motivate my younger siblings and cousins. It stresses me out when I try so hard and three of them don't want to go to college. Because then I think about what could I have done better."* (01:18:32)

Success and Optimal Health

This section aimed to understand how BMOC defined success and understand what they need in order to thrive.

The Difference Between Surviving and Thriving

When asked the difference between surviving and thriving, a couple participants summed it up for the group. One stated, *"Surviving is having enough, thriving is having excess."* (01:24:00) Another added, *"Surviving is... just having that bare minimum. Like, I can make it through the night. Surviving to me would be like, I don't have no food, I can't feed my family, so maybe I'll go hustle a little bit, get a few dollars to feed my family. Thriving is I'm a find that job, work my butt off, and support my family and stuff."* (01:24:04)

When asked what Black males in their community need to move from surviving to thriving, participants suggested mentors, better parenting and better schools. One participant explained, *"Say for instance, you know how they had Malcolm X, MLK, and people like that to help the community to go in one direction, that it's the right path, to do the right thing, we don't have that these days. I mean, we don't have nobody out telling you 'you need to do this, do that, go to school...' they don't care. And the neighborhood, they could care less."* (01:27:44) Another participant added, *"I agree with the fact that we need more people to mentor the kids, and get them on the right path, but it also means that we need to have more mentors for the parents, and we also need the teachers to step up because it kind of*

starts at home. If you want to thrive, or you want your kids to thrive...I think all parents need to start teaching their kids how to read earlier. That's one way to start getting your kids to thrive, teaching them to spell their own name earlier. There are students in class with me today that can only read on a fifth grade level, and that's cause teachers are pushing them through. I kind of think education, and educating the parents and the students and the kids would keep us thriving." (01:30:18)

BMOC Exposure to Successful People

Participants were asked how they define success and responded with both educational and financial milestones and leaving a "legacy." One explained, *"Having an education, owning your own business and being wealthy. You can do whatever you want to so as long as you have those three things." (01:34:06)* Another agreed, *"Having a good education, owning your own business and having a family. Being a family man and having a legacy that can be passed down." (01:34:27)* Another participant elaborated on the idea of leaving a legacy. *"My vision is to put my parents up comfortably until the day I die. Being able to leave behind money, and I'm not talking hundreds of thousands, I'm talking millions and billions for the generations after me. Putting up charities for young Blacks and Hispanics...My vision of success is to leave behind a legacy of kindness, knowledge and wisdom." (01:34:56)*

What BMOC Need to be Successful

When asked what they need in order to achieve the level of success they have defined for themselves, participants mentioned education and opportunities. One participant explained, *"Mine would be a good education, you know going through college. I plan on going to college for around 8-12 years. I want to be a video game designer, so I'm going to work on that." (01:38:42)* Another added, *"Mine is getting my education, and getting my college degree in marketing, and also getting a steady job so I would be able to save cash on the side so I will be able to start my own business." (01:39:16)*

Another participant stated that education wasn't necessarily his focus, *"I myself am one that doesn't believe a college education will get me anywhere because I don't have an exact plan to go to college. I do plan on graduating high school even if it is not on time...There are plenty of people that didn't graduate college that went back and got their degrees later after they started multi-million dollar empires...You can make money on doing almost anything...You just need to know how to read and write and keep the right people in your circle that can help you further along but at some point get an education." (01:40:15)* A participant agreed and disagreed with that statement, *"I don't think that you need a structured education or degree, but everything you mentioned was a form of education. Also, with all of those people that you mentioned had a plan that was already in effect before they didn't go the route of education. Bill Gates for instance...it's the plan he had before he went, nobody just drops out without a plan, knowing that they're going to be successful. So I believe that it first takes a plan of action to become successful without an education." (01:41:30)*

The Importance of Respect for BMOC

When asked what respect means to them, participants defined it as how people look at you and if they feel you have something going on with your life. One participant gave an example of this as it pertains to his friends, *"I can say, I have friends and I respect them like, man, they're doing this and this and that. And I get a little envious like man, what am I doing wrong? I need to start doing what you're doing. So out of respect, I'm going to come to you and ask what goals and what routes are you taking to be able to do this? I'm a little jealous, I wanna get doing what you do, but I wanna be better." (01:43:55)*

When asked who gets respect in America, participants mentioned *"people who work hard"* and *"people of power."* One participant expressed his view of how he felt that is not always the case. *"Both of those answers were great, and I think that's what respect would look like in America in a perfect world- a utopian society. Respect in America to me looks almost the exact opposite. People cheat their way to the top, in a way that's hidden, so I guess the immoral and the corrupt are usually the ones seen as these high and moral characters, because what they do has been done in the dark and has not necessarily been brought to light. Or even sometimes if it has been brought into the light, because of their position and their status there's a forgiveness clause attached to it. So I don't necessarily think it's the people that work the hardest. Because if was the people who work the hardest who get respect in America than I believe that teachers wouldn't be getting paid minimum wage and going through half the things they go through. So*

I have to disagree, I think politicians get the most respect and hold the most power in America.” (01:46:42) Another participant agreed, “The notion of respect, who gets respect, is he who holds the most power over me.” (01:47:42)

When asked specifically if young Black men get respect, all but one participant stated no. One participant explained, *“I don’t think African-American males get enough respect. My dad and I are major history nuts...and looking through history, there are a lot of things that without black people wouldn’t have been invented. Because I was African American, I’ve seen white girls hold their purses or scoot over in the elevator, or scoff me off when I asked for direction.” (01:50:32)* Another participant gave personal examples of how he felt he has experienced disrespect as a Black man. *“At one time I was in a full suit and my twin was in his ROTC uniform, and we walked in a building because we were going to fill out some job applications...and this secretary behind the desk, white lady, probably middle aged white lady, called security to have us removed out of nowhere...I think we don’t get respect at all. I think they kind of try to watch us to see what our next move is. We’re like an animal in a cage...Because we’ve been stereotyped and branded and don’t get the respect of actually being human beings, and being of the same country instead of looking at us for our color instead of looking at what we’ve done...why do you think there are riots now? They expect us to act this way but don’t give us the respect to not act this way, so when a black man gets shot on the street because of a cop, oh yeah there’s going to be a riot.” (01:51:26)*

One participant felt that Black men get the ultimate respect due to the fear of others. He explained, *“I think we get the ultimate respect in this country. I think we get the most respect out of any race, and that’s due to fear. When you fear something you have a certain high-level respect for it. When someone puts a gun in your face because of fear, whatever that person is doing you’re going to respect it and you’re going to listen...I think as young Black men we want to be accepted in a society that isn’t meant for us. So when we don’t get that acceptance we view it as disrespect...I see it as them fearing us is the ultimate respect because they know what we are capable of and by them trying to take that away from us is the respect.” (01:53:40)*

BMOC Define Optimal Health

When asked what it meant to be healthy, most participants focused primarily on terms related to physical and mental health, such as: *“eating right and exercising;” “a cleansed body spiritually and physically;” “having your mind right;” “treating our bodies like our prized possessions;”* and *“having a positive mindset on things.”*

When asked what it would feel like to be at the top of their game, participants stated that it would feel like everything is going right in their lives and *“smiling through whatever is going on.”* One participant stated, *“It would feel great. For me at the top of my game it would be being able to see my mom or dad smile. Even though they’re sick, seeing my mom or dad smile. Being able to call my sister up and tell ‘em I’m doing this this and that and they say ‘good job. Keep it moving.’ I’m making money I’m making music, and I’m doing what I love. That’s the top of my game.” (01:59:18)* Another added, *“When I’m at the top of my game it’s ecstasy. I’m on point, nothing could take me down, I could walk through any neighborhood, you can say whatever you want I don’t care, I’m just looking forward that’s all that matters to me. And I can focus better and sleep better.” (01:59:47)*

When asked what holds them back from being at the top of their game, participants mentioned their community, money, access to resources, lack of focus and motivation and lack of personal will power. One participant discussed the lack of motivation, *“I see it as an issue in the Black community. I see guys and girls, I see people trying to make up excuses to be popular, they care more about the social aspect instead of doing what they need to do. They are not motivated about going to school, doing their work. You can be right there trying to drag them out of bed, but some of them just don’t have that motivation.” (02:03:03)* All the participants admitted that procrastination is an issue for them and can slow them down from getting to where they want to be. One explained, *“I would say everyone has a little thing that they procrastinate on. Especially when you get a good amount of time, you’ll be like “oh, I could put it off here,” but then you realize ‘oh man I’ve put it off for so long.’” (02:06:03)*

When asked if there were any local resources available to them to help them live a healthy life, participants mentioned that they were aware of some, but accessing them was difficult due to expenses, particularly for medical care and healthy food.

Competition/Winning/Skills and Creative Talents

This section aims to understand how BMOC define and how they value competition. We also asked them to discuss their opportunities to pursue the American Dream, relative to mainstream populations. They talked about their personal talents and abilities and how those helped them compete in life.

Life as a Competition

All but one participant felt that life was a competition with others and with yourself. One participant stated, *"Everything is a competition. You've got to compete in life to be successful."* (02:10:18) Another added, *"It's a competition with yourself, and with other people. I'm constantly in a competition with myself to do better, get myself to a better state."* (02:10:55) The participant who felt life wasn't a competition stated, *"No, competition means you can lose. No one can beat me, so I'm not in competition with anybody. If you're in a competition, there's 1st place, 2nd, 3rd place, There was a motivational speaker who said 'if you're in competition with me, who's going to come in second?' Because he automatically knows he's going to win so I don't see life as a competition because that puts the possibility of me losing."* (02:11:20)

Reaction to Moderator's Statement

The moderator read the following statement: If you do certain things in life, if you work hard, if you develop a skill, if you do the right thing, then you get what? Participants finished the statement with comments such as: *"you reap the benefits" and "rewards."*

The moderator read the statement again, but added to the ending: If you do certain things in life, if you work hard, if you develop a skill, if you do the right thing, then you get rewards...you get a raise...you get recognition...you get respect. All the participants except one felt that the statement was primarily true. One explained, *"Yes and no. There are people out here who have developed master skills in their craft, and they're homeless. So I honestly believe yes and no."* (02:13:10) Another added that he felt luck was also a part of the equation, *"I do believe that there's a certain amount of luck in the universe that has to take place, or blessings for spiritual people, that has to take place for you to get to a certain place. I don't believe hard work alone can get you there."* (02:14:25)

The Creative Talents of BMOC

Participants were asked what being creative and talented meant to them and they had a variety of definitions. Participants described being creative as a "visual aspect" or "originality" and talented as "natural gifts you are born with" or "doing something a lot of people do very well."

Another added that he felt they went hand-in-hand, *"They go hand in hand for me. Like, I play guitar. That's a talent of mine. But to be creative with it and to turn it into something else and be able to use my guitar to make me some money or just make somebody happy or laugh, that's the creativity. So it's being able to take a skill that you have and use it in a different way or make something new out of it."* (02:16:10)

Participants felt that African-American males can excel at everything they put their mind too, but stereotypically they excel at sports and music. One participant explained, *"Looking at history we have excelled at everything. At some point in time in history and in the future we are going to excel at a little bit of everything."* (02:18:27)

Resources for Enhancing Creative Talents and Skills

Participants were asked what resources they used to enhance their creative talents and skills. Participants listed the following ways: go see a professor; school; YouTube; get feedback from experts in the field.

Existing Online/Offline Resources for BMOC

This section was skipped during this focus group due to time constraints.

**New Orleans Focus Group
New Orleans Adult Learning Center
139 South Broad Street
New Orleans, LA 70119**

Date: May 7, 2015
 Ethnicity: African-American Males
 Participants: 5 Participants (Average Age: 22 years-old)

Values

This section aimed to better understand the values of low-income urban BMOC and the obstacles they face...real or perceived.

What BMOC Value

Participants were asked to write down their top three values on a note card. Though answers varied, family was mentioned by all but one participant as a top value. Other responses included: friends, stability, underprivileged people, myself, creativity, love, spirituality, respect, success, God and health.

Change in Values Based on Exercise

When given a handout with a list of values and asked to consider them against what they had previously written, family remained a top value, but three of the participants modified at least one of their selections. They indicated that they had changed their values to things that better represented the way they felt or were more broader than what they had previously mentioned: *"underprivileged people to serving others and myself to being original," "respect to education,"* and *"health to staying fit."*

When asked what they meant by family, participants explained that they meant both immediate family and other relationships. One participant stated, *"When I think of family, I think of both immediate family, and then I'm also thinking about relationships. Assuming that that's your family in the long term. I guess it's kind of like a 'cheat word.' You know I'm thinking of my mom, my sister, but I'm also thinking about finding someone that I could have a family with in the future."* (01:07:37) Another participant mentioned a friend that he considered family, *"I got a friend but he got killed, I looked at him as a brother, he was my friend since we was 7 or 8 years old. His mom and his little brother, I look at them like family. I call her 'Mom' too and I call his little brother, 'brother.'" (01:08:30)*

When asked if they would consider themselves spiritual or religious, most participants described themselves as spiritual. One participant stated, *"When I say spirituality I just mean, most important for myself is believing in something. Anything whether it's Buddha, Yahweh, Jihad, yourself, as long as you believe in something and have faith in something that's keeping you pushing for betterment of self, or love of everyone else around you then, that's what I mean by spirituality...I'm more spiritual than religious, but I do indulge into different religions."* (01:09:20) Another participant added, *"I really can't explain what it's like to have faith, because it's so great it's so amazing. It's really what gets me through the day, so that's why it's so important to me. I consider myself to be more spiritual."* (01:10:30)

One participant felt he was neither spiritual or religious, *"I'm more of a 'show me' kind of person, and when you talk about religion, I feel like religion is very convenient for a lot of people, and a lot of people fit religion to what they need. And that's something that's for certain individuals, but it's not for me as an individual. I feel like I can get by doing things my own way instead of having this belief that there's somebody somewhere pulling strings that we can't see. Those sort of things don't really appeal to me."* (01:11:12)

Where BMOC Get There Values

This section was not asked during this focus group.

Obstacles to Living What BMOC Value

Participants were asked what gets in the way from them living what they value. These African-American males mentioned some different obstacles, including: themselves and finances. One participant stated, *"I used to make a lot of dumb decisions. I used to always start from here and make it to here and it would be a dumb decision that would put me back at part one...Now the only thing stopping me is me."* (01:14:55) The participant that mentioned wanting to help others stated, *"Finances. Basically, I can't fill nobody else's cup if mine isn't full. Just what I've seen in the past, if you have financial struggles or you're going through those personal struggles, you're not really there to serve others. You could be there in shell, but mentally you're thinking of your own survival."* (01:13:57)

Success and Optimal Health

This section aimed to understand how BMOC defined success and understand what they need in order to thrive.

The Difference Between Surviving and Thriving

When asked the difference between surviving and thriving, most participants looked at it from a financial perspective in that that surviving was just getting by while thriving was excelling. Another added, *"From what I've been through I would say that surviving is having at least two meals a day and having a few dollars in your pocket. Not too much...Making sure the people you care about are straight. Thriving is living good."* (01:16:50) Another stated, *"Surviving is doing just enough to get by. Surviving is just working paycheck to paycheck. I got a lot of family members back home that have all these dreams, but they just do enough to survive. Thriving is putting yourself in a position where you're never comfortable, so you can excel and be better. That's thriving. You've gotta force yourself to not stay content."* (01:17:15) Another participant suggested the difference is mental, *"It's definitely a mental state. Between surviving and thriving, that can make a person a monster or the nicest person you ever meet. Because when it comes down to surviving, I mean, you can't really think of the next man's business. I can respect it, but when push comes to shove, it's me over you and it's sad to say but it's human nature in a way."* (01:21:50)

When asked what Black males in their community need to move from surviving to thriving, participants suggested a new attitude, resources, seeing more Black men thriving and better shared economics among the Black community. One participant stated, *"Basically just stop the things that we do. Or not me anymore, but the things they do. All they do is look for trouble. They sit on the corner, gun on them, smoking weed, popping pills, and hustling, hitting crack heads upside the head with a gun and all that...I used to look at that stuff like it was cool but that shit ain't cool...They need a hug, a mentor or guidance. Anything to get their mind off that type of stuff."* (1:24:07) Another added, *"Besides money and resources, they need to see more Black men thriving. When you don't see someone that looks like you thriving then that wears on you. You think 'why isn't someone that looks like me thriving?' then you start to think that you can't do it because there is no one out there like you that is doing it...So you need the resources to get there and someone to show you how to use those resources."* (01:25:31)

Another participant suggested that young Black men need a fair chance. He stated, *"I feel where they are coming from, but I want to add one more thing and that is a fair chance. I'm different from everyone in here; I have dread locks. If I go into certain interviews I'm automatically pre-judged just because of my hair or the way I carry myself. I walk with a little soul in my step. I'm different, but I'm still an intellectual and educated but I get pre-judged just off the fact that I have dreadlocks. A lot of Black males in New Orleans have dreadlocks and they carry a bad reputation."* (01:28:24)

BMOC Exposure to Successful People

Participants were asked how they define success and they responded with a variety of both financial and more personal/holistic milestones. One participant stated, *"Having a nice house, nice couple cars, putting my little brother up, cause my little brother 4 years old. I want him to grow up, and I don't want him to remember any of the bad things I used to do I want him to remember the good things. I'm a music engineer that's what I do. So if I should make it with that, I would rather put my mom in a nice house, same for me. If I'm successful I want to make sure my family's successful. Even if I'm rich I would still go to school and get a degree. That won't change just because I've got money. I would still want better for me."* (01:29:50) Another added, *"I would say, accomplishing all major goals you set for yourself, whether it's finances, helping the next man, but at the same time, still obtaining inner peace, mental peace, and spirituality...Being stress free."* (01:31:15) Another followed-up and stated, *"Completing my life purpose."*

I don't really see success as a material thing, I see it as individual and only you can really know when you got it." (01:33:07) Yet another participant stated, "Success is happiness, whatever that is for you, that works. Some people want a bunch of cars, big house, some people don't. Some people are ok with doing volunteer work all their lives, if that's what you wanna do, that's success. Success isn't based on a value outside looking in, it's inside. 'I'm happy doing this, that's success for me.'" (01:33:58)

When asked who in their lives they consider to be successful, a couple participants listed their parents and one mentioned their grandparents. One participant stated, *"I would have to say my pops. My pops is the first successful person. Just his story, and where he's at now after being locked up in prison, and just how it's set up for you to be a second class citizen. And just fighting through those obstacles and getting where he's at. He's back at home in Alexandria, but I'm just saying with the amount of kids he had, and just how bad the situation looked fresh out, and where he's at now, with me graduating college and my brothers and sisters being in college, it's a different type of culture now. I see it as successful, just not seeing your situation as final or finite, and switching things around." (01:36:08) Another added, "I'm going to say my Grandmother, she's a real estate agent. She retired from Shell corporation, she did that for 35-40 years, and she doubled back and started doing real estate. She is a successful woman. I don't look at being successful as in having all the things a successful person would have...she just has all the mindsets of being successful." (01:37:20) The participants appreciated the work ethic of those people and the fact that they didn't use adversity as an excuse.*

What BMOC Need to be Successful

This section was not asked during this focus group.

The Importance of Respect for BMOC

When asked specifically if young Black men in New Orleans get enough respect, all the participants stated emphatically "no." One participant commented, *"Where do we get respect?" (01:41:09) Participants felt that the lack of respect was not only from society as a whole, but from other Black men as well. One participant commented, "Because when you see the privilege that somebody else holds just because of their skin, and you compare it to yours, the signs are obvious! When I go out in New Orleans and I'm getting my car, when I see a police car, I know consciously, that my odds of getting stopped are just higher!...I'm like OK that's a little disrespect right there. When you go out on Bourbon, I know if I bump into somebody, it could be another Black man. Depending on how he's feeling that day he might be ready to knock my head off, college or not. Even if he's from the same neighborhood it don't matter. It's just like, you're treated like a problem, you're about to be a problem, or 'let me just nip this in the bud before your ass start doing something stupid.' I haven't done nothing but I'm getting treated as if something's about to pop off...People can feel that, man." (01:41:30) Another stated, "Give respect you're gonna get respect. But most of the time in New Orleans, New Orleans is fucked up. I ain't even gonna lie, It's my city I love it to death, but most of the time you give respect you don't even get it back. That's why some of these youngins and older people have the mindset they be having towards people." (01:43:30) Another participant followed up, "I feel like Louisiana and New Orleans I mean we just live in a lawless land. Especially when you a black person, I mean, at the end of the day somebody could do damn near anything to me and the odds of me getting justice is really not that slim. I could get murdered, and just be a little NOLA.com article and people would go on with their day. These people that are doing it they don't have to respect you because there's no fucking consequence." (01:43:56)*

BMOC Define Optimal Health

When asked what it meant to be healthy, participants focused primarily on terms related to physical and mental health, such as: *"staying fit;" "eat good and drink good;" and "having your mind right."* One participant elaborated, *"I feel like being healthy is understanding that the mind, body and soul are working correspondingly together. So with that being said, one that can basically stay fit, and not really put toxins in their body, and keep inner peace. Really just treat your body as a temple, have respect for it." (01:46:12)*

Another added that in addition to personal behavior, where a person lives can impact their ability to be healthy. *"Being healthy, it starts off with the mind and body, those being in line, but then you gotta expand out- your environment gotta be on point too. Because if your environment is not in line with those, all those getting attacked. It's an individual thing, but I would be lying if I said your location doesn't matter, because it does...It would be easier*

to be healthy in certain environments when you have the house and all that...but trying to have that alignment when you're in some conditions that aren't suited for you, it's toxic." (01:46:52)

When asked what it would feel like to be at the top of their game, participants commented on how they would feel emotionally peaceful and confident and how they would approach life positively. One participant stated, *"It would feel peaceful. You know you doing everything you've gotta do, you know you're doing it at the top level...you don't have any worries because you know at the end of the day you're doing the best that you can do and there's nothing more." (01:49:22)* Another added, *"It feels like when you're playing a video game and you beat the boss...I did how it was written. I finished the last achievement and I got my reward." (01:49:39)* The one participant that was not a college student responded, *"To be at the top of my game. See I haven't had a job in a minute and I just started this new job working with my grandfather and on top of that working for a construction company...To be on top of my game is just waking up every morning, being dedicated to do these jobs. And just staying positive, and if I like it or don't like it, just make sure I'm there every day and respect what I have and be appreciative." (01:50:43)*

The mention of "not having to worry" when on the top of their game sparked a conversation where the participants were asked if worrying was something prevalent in their lives. The participants unanimously agreed that worrying was an emotion they were very familiar with in their day-to-day lives. One explained, *"One of my worries is being the next stereotype like 'Black man just shot and killed by an officer. That's something that's big today...I don't want to be another statistic. That's a worry I have every day.'" (02:00:05)* Other participants stated that police harassment was a worry of theirs as well. One stated, *"It has to be." (02:00:45)* Another added, *"If you are Black man you have to be a master navigator. If you're not aware of where you are at all the time, that's too big of a risk." (02:01:05)*

When asked what holds them back from being at the top of their game, participants mentioned both personal (i.e., lack of motivation, ego) and societal (i.e., lack of resources, racism) influences. One participant discussed his lack of motivation as an obstacle, *"I'd say part of it is myself. You know sometimes you don't have the motivation that others do to put in the work that is required to be at the top of your game. Some of it is also resources. At the end of the day, even if I feel like I'm trying my hardest I just don't have the access to certain things other people do." (01:52:24)* Another added, *"I would say it's personal. Like, being at the top of my game, it's a feeling. It's how you feel. So, you're going to have obstacles everywhere you go, it's just part of the challenge so being at the top of your game is being able to overcome those challenges and adapt to different situations." (01:56:24)*

Participant discussed the societal aspects as well. One mentioned, *"White supremacy, classism, I would have to say for lack of a better term 'player haters' just people being plain negative." (01:53:17)* Another later added, *"The media, they will only show you riots. They won't show you what led up to riots. They won't show you white riots. They're quick to put up a Black man, or any type of Black on Black violence instead of White on White crime...We rioting because they're killing us." (02:02:40)*

Competition/Winning/Skills and Creative Talents

This section aims to understand how BMOC define and how they value competition. We also asked them to discuss their opportunities to pursue the American Dream, relative to mainstream populations. They talked about their personal talents and abilities and how those helped them compete in life.

Life as a Competition

When asked if they felt life was a competition, some participants felt it was and some felt it wasn't. One participant stated, *"I think it doesn't have to be, but that's what it ends up becoming. You know when we talk about success, success is what you make it, it's not 'yo I got more money than this guy I'm more successful' but at the same time to get to that level of success you have to compete. There's someone who wants that job just like you, that's a competition by default: two people want the same thing one person's going to get it. So it's not a competition in the grand scheme of things, but to get to where you wanna go, you need to compete." (02:14:45)* Another participant added, *"As far as life being a competition, not with another man. I feel like my competition, me personally, is being better than the man I was yesterday." (02:15:38)*

When asked if they felt life in America was a competition, participants unanimously stated “yes.” A participant stated, *“It has to be. Because somebody’s gotta be at the bottom of the totem pole and that ain’t me.”* (02:15:53)

When asked how they planned on preparing to compete in America, participants listed: *“finish college;”* *“expand their knowledge;”* and *“networking.”*

Reaction to Moderator’s Statement

This section was skipped during this focus group.

The Creative Talents of BMOC

When asked what being creative and talented meant to them, participants made sure to include hard work in the equation. One participant responded, *“I think you have to balance between being creative and talented but you also have to be hard working. Talent never beats out hard work.”* (02:04:52) Another responded, *“I think being creative is pursuing your passion, having a skill that nobody else has and being able to do it to the best of your ability. You have to put hard work into it, which would make you talented, but being creative is what separates you.”* (02:06:15)

One participant felt that being creative and talented was critical to being a Black man. *“That’s how you live. That’s how you survive as a Black man...That’s your way out...There is no system for you to be successful. There is one for you to fail. You literally have to create something that is foolproof.”* (02:04:00)

Participants felt that African-American males can excel at anything, but stereotypically they excel at sports and music. One participant explained, *“It’s stereotypical that they expect us to only excel at sports and physical things. If you really want to look at history, there was a whole new Negro movement. They only show you the renaissance of Europe and the French Renaissance...but the Three Musketeers was written by a Black man. We are originators and creators of this world. We have a lot of capabilities, so that’s a confusing question to me.”* (02:07:24) Another responded, *“I think you really can’t answer that question because I think that it’s all of them. They just have to be on that stage. It wasn’t until I went to college that I saw Black men with talents that I had never saw them doing...writing, drawing, creating cartoons.”* (02:08:05)

Resources for Enhancing Creative Talents and Skills

Participants were asked what resources they used to enhance their creative talents and skills. Participants listed the following ways: books, using marijuana, the Internet, Brothers Empowered to Teach (a local non-profit).

Existing Online/Offline Resources for BMOC

This section was skipped during this focus group due to time constraints.

**Detroit Focus Group
The Mathis Community Center
19300 Greenfield Road, Detroit, MI 48235**

Date: May 12, 2015
Ethnicity: African-American Males
Participants: 5 Participants (Average Age: 20 years-old)

Values

This section aimed to better understand the values of low-income urban BMOC and the obstacles they face...real or perceived.

What BMOC Value

Participants were asked to write down their top three values on a note card. Though answers varied, family was mentioned by all but one participant as a top value. Other responses included: success, loyalty, religion, love, God, people, wealth, money and respect.

Change in Values Based on Exercise

When given a handout with a list of values and asked to consider them against what they had previously written, family remained a top value, but four of the participants modified at least one of their selections. They indicated that they had changed their values to things that better represented the way they felt: *"loyalty to individuality," "love to loyalty," "wealth to life" and "respect to life."*

When asked what they meant by family, participants explained that they meant both immediate family and other relationships. One participant stated, *"You don't have to be blood in order to be family...a lot of these things on this list tie into family, like respect, loyalty and those other things tie into that aspect. So like I said it can be blood family or friends you grew up with."* (01:08:02)

When asked if they would consider themselves spiritual or religious, participants described themselves as spiritual. One participant stated, *"I think I'm more spiritual. Like, I like to pray, but I don't believe everything the preacher say."* (01:14:30) Another participant added, *"I believe I'm more spiritual, too. Religion, there's a lot of stuff that goes into that but being spiritual is pretty much based off your relationship with god, so as long as you got that I think you alright."* (01:14:52) Another participant commented, *"On the initial survey I said religious, however now thinking about it you can realize that religion is man-made. So I would say I'm more so spiritual because there is more of a one-on-one relationship with God and religion is what the preacher is saying and what you get out of the text in the bible."* (01:16:53)

Where BMOC Get There Values

When asked where they got their values from, participants mentioned family (both extended and immediate) and their environment or life experiences. One participant stated, *"I would say my grandparents more than anyone, even more than my parents. My father, he wasn't so supportive. He's been in and out and it's been like that for years now. My mom, we really don't have a relationship either, she's remarried and stuff like that. So my grandmother, she's like my best friend honestly."* (01:08:36) Another explained, *"My whole environment. Out of everything that I've learned that has probably been the highest factor. Taking a little bit out of everything and seeing what is the most important from what I've learned."* (01:09:26) Another participant explained how his time and experience in a juvenile detention home helped him change his life.

Obstacles to Living What BMOC Value

Participants were asked what gets in the way from them living what they value. A couple of the males mentioned how finances were an obstacle to them achieving success because they had to balance work and education. One participant stated, *"With me, success is a huge thing because I'm trying to go to med school to be a pediatrician. But the way the school system is set up, it's very difficult because you have to have a job to pay for school just to graduate, and get a job to pay the debt you got from school. So that's part of the roadblock that I'm facing."* (01:19:50) Another added, *"I think the school system plays a big part of things, especially in my life, reaching the goals that I want to reach. I'm a workaholic and I like to work, and if I work part time, to go to school, that's going to take away from my funds to pay for school. So, it's a lot...I wanna do journalism and broadcasting, but I always argue with myself about when is the right time to go back to school versus working so I can survive and eat?"* (01:21:01)

Another participant discussed how being a Black male can be an obstacle. *"You gotta be careful out here, a lot of stuff you do you just gotta know how to act and you gotta learn how to play the game going through life especially. Being Black you gotta know the right things to do out here just so you can transition a little more easier into what you wanna get."* When asked by the moderator if being a Black male gets in the way, the participant continued. *"It can because you're limited from particular opportunities but it's a blessing at the same time...It's a blessing and a curse, you just gotta know how to play it when you need to."* (01:21:58)

Success and Optimal Health

This section aimed to understand how BMOC defined success and understand what they need in order to thrive.

The Difference Between Surviving and Thriving

When asked the difference between surviving and thriving, most participants considered surviving to be just getting through day-to-day while thriving was seen as having a goal you are going after. One participant mentioned, *"I feel as if surviving is basically making it day by day, you know just going through the motions. Thriving is, like he said, being a workaholic, making sacrifices so that you can make it through life and excel."* (01:23:28) Another agreed, *"Thriving is when you're trying to get somewhere. Surviving you are just doing what you gotta do to just get by."* (01:23:41) Another participant added, *"I think surviving is kinda what I'm doing now. I think thriving would be reaching my certain goals continuously, so goal after goal after goal. You're actually moving to something different in your life."* (01:24:18)

A couple participants looked at thriving from a mental perspective, *"Maybe when you're thriving you don't really have too much worries, when you're just surviving you still got stuff you worrying about all the time but when you thriving it's kinda like, you just going with the motion."* (01:24:03) Another participant stated, *"When you're just surviving, it seems like you're just stressing a lot. But when you're thriving, it's like you ain't got no stress."* (01:24:52)

When asked what Black males in their community need to move from surviving to thriving, participants focused on stronger leadership and more role models and resources in the community. One participant stated, *"Probably leadership. Any kind of positive leadership. I played a lot of sport when I was younger now these kids just play a lot of video games."* (01:25:28) Another participant piggy-backed on that comment, *"We need more role models and we have to avoid the negative stigma that a black male as a leader can have and reverse that into a positive role model."* (01:26:08) He went on to reference former Detroit mayor Kwame Kilpatrick. *"Not just white people but when other races see a Black leader tearing apart a city like that they get the thought that's how all Black people are...and especially Black males. That's why we have to work twice as hard to get half of what they receive."* (01:26:32)

BMOC Exposure to Successful People

Participants were asked how they define success and most responded primarily from a perspective of being in a financially stable position to help others around them. One participant stated, *"Nice house, nice car, probably married, and I would be able to help my family, able to help my parents if they need it. That's success for me, I'd be straight."* (01:27:25) Another added, *"Taking care and giving back not only to my family, but to everyone in my community, period."* (01:27:52) One participant stressed the ability to own things. *"Being able to have something in your name, not just having to rent...a car or a house. And being able to take care of your family."* (01:28:00) One participant expressed that his idea of success was, *"Having the leisure to do what I want to do."* (01:27:45)

When asked who in their lives they consider to be successful, a few participants listed members of their family. One participant stated, *"I think my grandmom's successful. She owns some houses, she owns some cars, and she be going on trips."* (01:33:30) Another added, *"My uncle Butch. When I was younger he was in law school and now he's a lawyer. He was the only one who always seemed like he was on the up and up. A new house, new car, every time I see him...He worked hard. He work hard for sure. He didn't graduate high school or nothing, he just ended up going back getting his GED, and then just going crazy, going up and up. I respect him cause all his brothers were going down the same road, then he had a wake-up call and turned his life around."* (01:33:48) Another participant referred to his uncle, *"I would say my uncle for numerous reasons. He played sports since he was little, he played football at the University of Michigan. He joined a fraternity there, he balanced both of those and still did great in school. Now he works for Nissan so every 2 years, he just has cars at his luxury of what he wants to choose from, and he owns his own house, has a nice successful marriage with 2 daughters, so that's what I see as successful."* (01:36:46)

What BMOC Need to be Successful

When asked what they need in order to achieve success as they define it, participants mentioned: hard work, persistence, positive attitude and available resources.

When asked what holds them back from being the best they can be, the majority of participants focused on their own personal attributes such as decision-making and procrastination. One participant stated, *"Decision making, and probably just being lazy sometimes."* (01:29:47) Another commented, *"I don't deal with [procrastination] well. 'Cause I've had many of times where I had papers due on a Monday but then there was this party on a Saturday that I want to go to so instead of finishing the paper, I would tell myself 'oh I can get it done on Sunday.' But then wake up Sunday, possibly with a hangover, not wanting to do the assignment, then get to Monday, 'oh can't turn it in now.'" (01:31:15) Another participant followed up, "Say there's like a game on or something, I'll say I'm about to do my homework, but then I'll be like 'in five minutes I'm gonna do it,' and then five minutes comes I'll be like 'I'll do it in three minutes,' and then that comes, and I just don't do it. I'll come up with an excuse in my head about why I don't need to do it."* (01:31:46)

The Importance of Respect for BMOC

When asked specifically if young Black men get enough respect, the participants seemed to have mixed feelings about it. One participant commented, *"As a whole, no, I feel as if we get more stigma than we get respect."* (01:37:55) Another added, *"It depends. It depends on if you doing what they want you to do. Everybody work for somebody, so as long as you're doing what your employer per se wants you to be doing, you're ok. But the moment you step out and you wanna go ahead and do what you wanna do and go off on your own little tangent, that's when you might lose some respect."* (01:38:22)

BMOC Define Optimal Health

When asked what it meant to be healthy, participants focused primarily on physical and mental health. One participant explained, *"I would say physical and mental health, basically being, obviously not obese, but having it all in the mind."* (01:39:15)

Participants were asked if worrying was something prevalent in their lives and all but one participant agreed that it was. One mentioned, *"With the level of competition in the medical field, just what the day will bring. Just making sure my scores are up, just trying to be the best in the field."* (01:58:24) Another added that with his desire to be a news reporter he worried about, *"Being popular, being someone that someone would want to look and listen to."* (01:58:35) Another participant worried about if he would accomplish things in life. *"I worry about being successful. Am I going to be successful when I get older...Am I going to be able to pay my bills on time? Cause I know a lot of people that are late on their bills and I don't want to be like that."* (01:59:16)

Participants also acknowledged that they worried about their own safety and livelihood as young Black men. A participant commented, *"I always worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow's not a promise. I could do something today that could prevent me from doing anything that I want to do tomorrow. Or just, my surroundings. Or I could say the wrong thing, be at the wrong place at the wrong time, and that could be that, ya know?"* (02:00:44) Another added

that he worried about, *“getting pulled over and making a wrong move.”* (02:01:25) Another participant elaborated on that comment, *“The police be driving around my neighborhood a lot, and we be on the block, and the police might mistake me, I be thinking they gonna mistake me for being somebody I’m not, like say something just happened down the street, like somebody might describe me as that person and then I gotta go to jail for it. That’s the hard thing.”* (02:01:33)

Competition/Winning/Skills and Creative Talents

This section aims to understand how BMOC define and how they value competition. We also asked them to discuss their opportunities to pursue the American Dream, relative to mainstream populations. They talked about their personal talents and abilities and how those helped them compete in life.

Life as a Competition

When asked if they felt life was a competition, some participants felt it was and some felt it wasn’t. One participant stated, *“Yeah, to me you’re competing with everybody. ‘Cause everybody wanna beat you.”* (01:43:58) Another added, *“Everyone’s not going to make it, that’s how I feel. There’s probably a million people that want the same thing that you wanna do. And there may be one slot for that one position or that one dream job or that one thing that you wanna do, but somebody else is going to want to do that. And you have to compete with them, and there’s only one person that’s gonna win.”* (01:44:49)

Another commented how the competition was personal. *“I think you’re pretty much just competing with yourself. If you do what you supposed to do, you’re going to be straight. You’ll be alright. All the bad habits and stuff that you’ve got going on, that’s what you’re competing against.”* (01:44:11)

Reaction to Moderator’s Statement

The moderator read the following statement: If you do certain things in life, if you work hard, if you develop a skill, if you do the right thing, then you get what? Participants finished the statement with comments such as: *“rewards;”* *“success;”* and *“what’s coming to you.”*

The moderator read the statement again, but added to the ending: If you do certain things in life, if you work hard, if you develop a skill, if you do the right thing, then you get rewards...you get a raise...you get recognition...you get respect. All the participants felt that the statement was partially true or true on occasion. One participant elaborated, *“Sometimes, I mean there’s always something that always knock you down. So I mean no matter if you’re doing the right thing, there’s always something that can trip you up, so it just depends kinda.”* (01:47:01)

The Creative Talents of BMOC

When asked what being creative and talented meant to them, participants responded with comments like *“having a unique skill,”* *“being an individual”* and *“being marketable.”* Another participant elaborated, *“Being creative with your talent, like doing something with your talent, doing something different with your talent that another person with the same talent is not doing.”* (01:49:00) Another added the importance of hard work, *“I think talent is more God-given. But I read a book called Talent Isn’t Enough because hard work can beat out talent any day. You can be the most talented person, but if you work harder, you might make it over him because he could be talented but lazy.”* (01:50:25)

Participants felt that African-American males can excel at graffiti, rapping, art, sports, business, dancing and entertainment.

Resources for Enhancing Creative Talents and Skills

Participants were asked what resources they used to enhance their creative talents and skills. Participants listed that they go to: school, the studio, church, wherever they can find people, and internships.

Existing Online/Offline Resources for BMOC

This section aimed to understand what online and offline resources BMOC access and what resources they want.

Online Resources

This section was skipped during this focus group due to time constraints.

Type of Mobile App BMOC Wish They Could Have to Help be Successful

When asked what type of mobile app they wished they could have for helping them be successful, one participant said he wanted an all-inclusive app. He explained, *"One stop shop with everything I could ever imagine."* (02:07:24) Two participants wanted an app that could help identify internships.

Another wanted an app that could help him figure out if he wanted to pursue his chosen field of study. *"A free career aptitude test, and I only say that because sometimes I find myself wondering if with the length of time I'm going to be in med school and other schooling, do I really want to do this, is my heart set in it. So with an aptitude test, you can kind of find out subconscious things about yourself that you like and dislike."* (02:06:45) The participant that liked to rap wished for, *"an app where I could record music and then send it to like the biggest producers."* (02:07:39)

Offline Resources

This section was skipped during this focus group due to time constraints.

APPENDIX B:
LATINO FOCUS GROUP SUMMARIES
(LOS ANGELES & LONG BEACH)

**Los Angeles Focus Group
Optimist Youth Homes
6857 Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, CA 90042**

Date: February 25, 2015
Ethnicity: Latino Males
Participants: 4 Participants (Average Age: 18.5 years-old)

Values

This section explores the personal values of low-income urban BMOC and the obstacles they face (real or perceived) in living out those values on a daily basis.

What BMOC Value

Participants were asked to write down their top three values on a note card. All of the participants chose family as a top value. Other responses included: God; education; music; friends; career; housing; and dreams.

Change in Values Based on Exercise

When given a handout with a list of values and asked to consider them against what they had previously written, the majority of the participants changed at least one value. Family, however, remained a top selection. A participant stated, *"I kept family, I changed to love and money, because I think having love in your life has a lot to do with being successful and having people back you up. And then money, because if you don't have a job you don't have money, you're going to be on the street."* (01:04:19)

When asked to explain why family was important, participants expressed that they wanted to set positive examples for siblings, and that family provided a support system. One participant explained, *"I think family is so important because I've always had a backup. If anything falls wrongs, or anything goes bad, I'm going to have them no matter what."* (01:05:55)

Where BMOC Get There Values

When asked where they got their values from, family was mentioned as the primary source. One participant explained the influence of family, *"You get them [values] from your family, you grow up around your family, your born with your family so...that's just where it is."* (01:06:28)

Participants were also asked to discuss the importance of spirituality in their lives. Though a couple described themselves as having a religious background, no one acknowledged spirituality as significantly impacting their lives. One participant explained, *"In my family, we do believe in God but we're not very religious, we go to church maybe Easter and Christmas that's about all."* (01:07:13) Another added, *"I did take the initiative to try and get close with God but I never felt it to be as strong as it's described by other people so it never really stuck with me."* (01:07:38)

Obstacles to Living What BMOC Value

Participants were asked "what gets in the way from them living what they value?" One participant expressed that Latinos faced societal obstacles and stereotypes, *"My parents were immigrants...I still have family here that is undocumented, working in the fields, working for wages that were most of the time unfair and unfair working conditions so a lot of the times it was the suppression that they felt from society."* (01:09:10) Another participant added that life experiences and a drug problem had been obstacles. He stated, *"I had a drug problem that stopped me from getting a job and working. I've done nothing my whole life, I haven't done my education until now...I will be graduating on time but that's just pure luck. So, my drug problem was my biggest obstacle."* (01:08:30)

Success and Optimal Health

This section aims to understand what success looks and feels like to BMOC, and explored what they need to thrive at the level of optimal health (physical, emotional, mental, etc.), rather than merely survive.

The Difference Between Surviving and Thriving

When asked what was the difference between surviving and thriving, participants described surviving as living day-by-day and doing the bare minimum to get by. One participant elaborated, *“Surviving for me was stealing a Pop-Tart for breakfast, not having any money.”* (01:12:15)

On the other hand, thriving was described as working diligently towards life goals, such as having a career and/or family and living comfortably without having to worry; *“Thriving would be having something to fall back on...if your check doesn’t come in on the day it’s supposed to, do you have a cushion? That’s thriving not surviving.”* (01:12:15)

Another participant summed it up this way, *“I think surviving is how I go about my day right now, for now we go to school, we eat, go out, rec, that’s about all but when I’m done here and I get through college, and hopefully get a job as a doctor, I would then be thriving. I’ll have a source of income, I’ll be able to eventually afford a house, have a family, and that’s where I’ll be thriving.”* (01:11:40)

BMOC Define Success and Their Exposure to Successful People

Participants were asked how they define success. Participants listed such things as: graduating from high school; going to college; having a career and good income; and a healthy home and family. A participant stated, *“Success for me, half of my success would be graduating high school, and then being able to go to college and graduate college. That would be success for me.”* (01:13:40)

When asked who in their life they considered to be successful, participants mentioned mentors and close family members who were successful in their personal and professional lives. One participant mentioned, *“My aunt back in Mexico. She went to college, she got a degree in teaching, ended up being a principal in two different places and now she’s living in a big house, living comfortably, two pensions, so she’s always been someone I look up to and try to base myself off of and motivate myself to be like that.”* (01:17:45)

Participants added that they respected the successful people in their lives because of the knowledge they possessed, their kindness, willingness to help others and personal motivation. One participant stated, *“My sailing instructor. My grandfather got me into a program before he passed, and my sailing instructor was successful. He didn’t have to work anymore, he just owned these boats that he was willing to lend to me to teach me how to be on the water without a motor, so I’d say that’s a successful person in my life.”* (01:17:20)

What BMOC Need to be Successful

Participants mentioned that BMOC needed more access to education (i.e. college degree), personal ambition and goals, and mentors in order to achieve success. One participant explained, *“I see it a lot in my community, that you have mom and dad working two jobs a day and not being at home, the oldest raising the youngest, so a lot of the times it’s that involuntary lack of parental guidance in a way, not having someone to go to and talk to when you have problems with school or in your life.”* (01:13:12)

When asked what holds them back from being successful, responses included: anger problems; peers and negative influences. One participant discussed the pressure of negative influences, *“I would say distractions ‘cause there’s so many things in the world that you could do and you get sidetracked and you do other things instead of trying to get a job or study more...I used to smoke a lot and would just skip school and I would be with my friends and everything.”* (01:15:41)

The Importance of Respect for BMOC

When asked what respect means to them, participants defined it as being honest and real, loyal, trustworthy, and working through conflict with other people in a positive manner. A couple of participants defined respect within the relationships that they have with their parents and family, *"You might be mad at your parents, they say things you don't like, but at the end of the day, they raised you and you have to be respectful to them because without them you wouldn't even be here."* (01:21:35)

When asked who gets respect in America, participants answered: the wealthy; celebrities, and societal influencers. One participant explained, *"Money is power, power is respect."* (01:23:44) In order to receive respect from peers, participants felt that honesty and loyalty were important and that you have to show respect to others in order to get it. Being polite and having manners were also seen as ways to receive respect in the community.

When asked if Latinos get enough respect, participants felt that they did not. A participant noted, *"No, I don't feel that they do. Sometimes it's just the way we get stereotyped, or judging the way we look they might think 'oh he's involved in gangs,' or 'he's involved in violence' or 'he's from an immigrant family, he's up to no good.'" (01:26:08)*

BMOC Define Optimal Health

When asked what it meant to be healthy, most participants focused primarily on terms related to physical health, such as: exercising; knowing what you put in your body; healthy nutrition (e.g. eating three meals a day) and good hygiene.

When asked what it would feel like to be at the top of their game, answers varied from feeling powerful, having confidence, being financially successful, and not feeling stress. One participant explained, *"Not being stressed at all. Knowing that whatever you do is going to come out good."* (01:28:50) Participants acknowledged that "haters", peer pressure, and negative temptations can be barriers to success. One participant elaborated, *"Temptation to use drugs. Temptation to go the wrong way. Not to go to school. Like he said, your peers are doing these things and it kinda looks fun and it's something you want to do so it's tempting. And if you follow it, you're not going to be at the top of your game. You're going to be at the bottom."* (01:29:39)

Competition/Winning/Skills and Creative Talents

This section aims to understand how BMOC define and how they value competition. We also asked them to discuss their opportunities to pursue the American Dream, relative to mainstream populations. They talked about their personal talents and abilities and how those helped them compete in life.

Life as a Competition

When asked what competition meant to them, participants stated that it meant competing against others for resources. Participants agreed that competition was a part of life. One participant stated, *"Definitely. You compete for everything. You compete for things at the store...once you get out of school you compete for a job. You have to compete for housing, do you have enough money, will you be able to make the down payment, everything is a competition."* (01:35:27) Another added, *"There's never going to be anything that you can say is not a competition. I've experienced it at school, my own professors have told me 'you're not going to receive help from your peers, because in 5 years you'll be competing for the same jobs that they are.'" (01:25:55)*

Reaction to Moderator's Statement of the "American Promise"

The moderator read the following statement: "If you do certain things in life, if you work hard, if you develop a skill, if you do the right thing, then you get rewards: you get a raise, you get recognition, you get respect. Is that true?"

Reactions to the Moderator's statement were mixed. Some participants felt as though the statement definitely would lead to success, while others expressed that failure was a part of life and could not be avoided. One participant explained, *"Motivation and hard work throughout a lifetime lead you to success, but at some times there are just not those opportunities...there are some things that unfortunately that we can't control or you yourself can't control, limited availability is also one of those things."* (01:38:57)

In order to achieve success, participants mentioned that they were graduating from high school, going to college and participating in community support programs (e.g., job training). One participant described the help he was receiving from a community support program, *"I'm in an independent living program that teaches me independent living skills to be on your own. They actually just helped me this last weekend start looking into colleges...I'm doing almost everything in my power to get there [success] for when I get out of this independent living program and live on my own to be successful there and to move up."* (01:40:49)

The Creative Talents of BMOC

Participants were asked what being creative and talented meant to them. Participants described being creative as adapting to different situations or finding different or better ways to do something (job tasks, school assignments etc.). They felt talent was something that you have from the beginning and have to put into use. Participants provided examples of the benefits being creative can provide a person. For example, a participant mentioned how playing an instrument can provide stress relief and self-confidence. Another mentioned the ability to use creativity to solve problems at school and at work; *"It means being able to adapt...[if] the first path that you've taken doesn't work, but you're creative enough to modify that path, or find something else that's going to work more efficiently, that creativity and that talent that you have is definitely going to help you out."* (01:42:08)

Participants agreed that Latinos excel at several creative talents, including knowing two languages; *"I would say a talent Hispanics have is that they know two languages. That's a huge advantage because you're pretty much equal twice; you know two languages and that's even better than just learning one."* (01:44:59) Creativity was also considered an important life skill, *"You need to be creative in a lot of places, you need to be creative in your education to write that essay, you have to be creative in putting your words together...those can apply in bigger situations."* (01:45:52)

Resources for Enhancing Creative Talents and Skills

Participants commented that they used school and mentors to increase their talents and skills. One participant said he uses any comfortable and quiet place to enhance his creative skills; *"Wherever you're comfortable, could be the park to play soccer, or a quiet room to play the guitar in and practice, or on stage in front of a small crowd, it's a good place to express yourself."* (01:48:13) Practicing and training were added as important components to improving skills. Participants said they weren't aware of any resources that were specifically for Latinos.

Existing Online/Offline Resources for BMOC

In this section BMOC discussed the quantity and quality of resources available to them, both via online/digital tools and in their respective home communities. We also explored whether these resources were helpful in the process of achieving their goals.

Online Resources

When asked for online resources that would help them achieve success, responses included: Internet, YouTube, Netflix. One participant explained why they mentioned YouTube, *"You can see videos. I feel like my talent, my creativity, I didn't find it until recently, so I haven't done much looking for it, but if I was to, I would look on YouTube."* (01:51:20)

Type of Mobile App BMOC Wish They Could Have to Help be Successful

When asked what type of mobile app they wished they could have for helping them be successful, one participant mentioned an app that could connect him to a variety of people that would be able to answer questions he had. *"For me, I know I experience a lot of trouble finding people to speak to over the phone. I don't really like chatting with people online or through email; I really like that over the phone communication. That app for me would be a 24/7 hotline, so if you had a question about how to file a paper for work, or how to build a resume, or maybe you found a job online, they could talk to you, or guide you how to figure out the best way to manage that."* (01:55:06)

Offline Resources

When asked for resources in their community that help them enhance or develop their skills, responses included: Gym membership, bus pass (job transportation) and healthy food options. One participant mentioned his mentor as a valuable resource. *"I talk to my mentor through a program called METFA. My mentor is currently the lady that started this organization. She goes to juvenile halls and state penitentiaries. She teaches men who are in the state pen who are doing life, how to be mentors for younger guys that are coming in, that are gonna get out, so these guys can become mentors to younger kids like us to stay out of jail."* (01:56:52)

Long Beach Focus Group
Centro CHA Inc.
1900 Atlantic Ave 2nd Floor, Long Beach, CA 90806

Date: February 26, 2015
 Ethnicity: Latino Males
 Participants: 5 Participants (Average Age: 21 years-old)

Values

This section explores the personal values of low-income urban BMOC and the obstacles they face (real or perceived) in living out those values on a daily basis.

What BMOC Value

Participants were asked to write down their top three values on a note card. Though answers varied, family was mentioned consistently as a top value. Other responses included: God; success; happiness; feeling productive; and health.

Change in Values Based on Exercise

When given a handout with a list of values and asked to consider them against what they had previously written, the majority of the participants changed at least one value with family, education, and health being the most valuable. A participant stated, *"Mine was feeling productive, and I changed it to education. I don't seem to be productive without being educated in some way. You have to learn how to be productive."* (01:05:50)

When asked to define family and why it was important to them, participants defined family as immediate relatives, as well as anyone you can trust and gives continuous support. A participant explained, *"Family can be your blood relatives, but it can also be someone who cares for you no matter what you do and who just wants to see you be successful in life and is always trying to help you [and] motivate you no matter what you do, even if you're in a bad situation they're still constantly motivating you telling you they love you, like it could be a really close friend you've known for years or it could be your mom, your dad, your uncle...they're always really important to have in your life because you can't get anywhere alone."* (01:07:54)

Participants were also asked to discuss the importance of spirituality in their lives. The participants suggested that their spirituality was different than being religious. They described spirituality as believing in a non-religious higher power and having a personal relationship with a God. One participant mentioned, *"I didn't put God...I believe in something that's there, but I just don't specifically choose a religion."* (01:08:46) Another added, *"You can't say that religion is the same thing as God because God is like a spiritual bond...when religion is something that's man-made when God is something supernatural. That's the difference I see."* (01:09:28)

Where BMOC Get Their Values

When asked where they got their values from, all of the participants felt that they had received their values from their family. One participant explained, *"As you grow up, it depends on your family, most people will tell you family comes first all the time [and] take care of your family. The only way you can take care your family is by having a good education, being successful, helping them out, helping others out, being happy, being positive in life."* (01:12:09) Another participant added that life experiences can also influence your values. *"Part of it is personal experience and part of it is how I was brought up and what I was taught."* (01:11:55)

Obstacles to Living What BMOC Value

Participants were asked "what gets in the way from them living what they value?" Multiple participants talked about how being lazy and procrastinating can be an obstacle. One participant stated, *"Honestly, sometimes I think it's just being lazy 'cause I think it doesn't matter where you live, it matters if you're motivated, if you want something, no matter where you are you can go get it and if you're lazy you can't do it."* (01:12:59) Another added, *"In my circumstance, for my part it's procrastinating. Like me being lazy, but don't get me wrong. I've also done*

moves to get to where I want to be, but at the end of the day I feel everything has it's time. If I don't feel ready, I try not to rush things. But when I try not to rush things I tend to fall back on them. But I'm never off track, I just tend to procrastinate." (01:14:35)

The lack of money was also seen as an obstacle by one participant. *"I think money is one of the biggest things that prevents people from accomplishing things because most of the time I have to not do things...if money wasn't so hard to obtain people would have more opportunities to do more things to improve themselves." (01:15:45)*

Success and Optimal Health

This section aims to understand what success looks and feels like to BMOC, and explored what they need to thrive at the level of optimal health (physical, emotional, mental, etc.), rather than merely survive.

The Difference Between Surviving and Thriving

When asked what the difference between surviving and thriving was, participants described surviving as *"barely making it."* One male explained, *"Surviving means like, you pay your bills, you pay your rent but you've only got like \$70 in your pocket when that's done...you're making it but you're struggling." (01:17:35)* He continued to describe thriving as not having to worry about things. *"Thriving means that like, you're in a position where you don't have to worry about if you're going to make it. You're successful. You can afford to buy yourself a car, or pay his rent. Thriving you're more successful, and surviving just means like you're struggling sometimes, you've gotta ask for help." (01:17:35)* Thriving was also described as having excess money and life options, *"Thriving is having more things than what you need to survive." (01:18:25)*

When asked what young Latino men need to move out of survival mode, one participant addressed immigration and the difficulty many Latinos have with obtaining citizenship. *"Permission to be in the state, because a lot of Mexicans, they suffer from getting their social security or getting their papers done just to be here...there's a lot of Mexican kids...they're like on top of things, they're a lot better than a lot of the other kids, but the only reason they can't go to college or be a lawyer or be an engineer is because they don't have their papers." (01:18:42)*

Another participant talked about how using drugs and alcohol can hinder youth from moving out of survival mode; *"I think it's safe to say that a lot of guys in Long Beach, like Mexicans around our age, a lot of them smoke weed and do drugs. I've personally seen that hold people back from reaching their full potential." (01:19:59)*

BMOC Define Success and Their Exposure to Successful People

Participants were asked how they define success and provided definitions such as: being happy (i.e. doing what makes you happy); being educated; having family and friends; being financially secure and stress-free.

When asked who in their life they considered to be successful, each participant mentioned a family member who persevered through tough life situations to become successful. They respected the motivation and dedication to be successful that these people had shown. One participant gave an example, *"I have a cousin...he started messing up and he wasn't very good at school...he just didn't care, you know? And I watched him go from that to finishing high school, going to college for architecture and then getting a job in architecture. I see that he started out where I was, and he really applied himself...I seem him doing that stuff, and it's just like 'I can do it too.'" (01:29:14)*

Another participant explained how he saw his mother as a success, *"My mom, she's been through a lot. She started off in Mexico with me, just me and her going around selling. She used to make food at home, and she would have me walking around with her in the streets selling food to all types of people. She made enough money selling food for me to come over here, and then she stayed over there and made enough money for her to come over here...To me my Mom is a strong woman and she means a lot to me." (01:28:10)*

What BMOC Need to be Successful

When asked what types of things could help them to be successful, participants mentioned personal motivation and mentors as integral aspects to being successful. A participant explained, *"Having a good mentor, somebody that's*

already been there... [that tells you] this is what you go to do, I'm not going to give it to you, I'll show you the way." (01:22:31)

When asked what holds them back from being the best they can be, participants agreed that peers can be a negative influence. A participant stated, *"If you're just surrounding yourself with people who aren't trying to do anything with their life you're not going to get anywhere, sometimes you've just got to cut everybody off and just do your own thing."* (01:26:33) One male added that not having someone to talk to (e.g. peer, mentor) can stop a person from moving forward in life.

The Importance of Respect for BMOC

When asked what respect means to them, participants felt respect was a "strong" word. Participants felt that a person who is respectful carries themselves well, does what other people tell them to do, hasn't done anyone "dirty," and is able to balance life and friends.

When asked who gets respect in America, multiple participants mentioned people who are honest and reliable as getting respect. One participant described the importance of honesty, *"Someone who's honest I guess, someone who says that they're going to do something and they do it and that just builds your reputation and your respect."* (01:37:05) Others added that being kind, trustworthy and having positive interactions with other people were also beneficial to getting respect. When asked if Latino men received enough respect in their community, participants felt that respect didn't have to do with ethnicity. As one participant explained, *"[Respect] is about everybody, it's not just our race. It all depends on who you are and they type of person you are. If you don't respect yourself how do you expect other people to respect you?"* (01:38:41)

BMOC Define Optimal Health

When asked what it meant to be healthy, most participants focused primarily on terms related to physical health, such as: having good nutrition; working out; getting enough sleep; having good hygiene and going to the doctor for regular checkups. A male summarized it as such, *"Being healthy to me is, you're given a life and you're supposed to take care of it. You got a car, you're supposed to take care of it. You need to give it its gas, get the oil changed, wash it....We're given something from someone, we don't know who, whether it's your higher power, whatever you believe in, just take care of it. Only you know if what you're putting in your body is good or bad. Put good into your body, that's health right there."* (01:40:44)

One male added that being healthy also included mental health. He elaborated, *"It's not always about working out or eating healthy. If you don't have a mental state of mind then your health is not going to go anywhere. You could work out all you want, but if in your head you're never going to be successful or you're never moving forward, you're never going to be doing anything, you're going to be stuck in the same place and that's not healthy."* (01:41:57)

When asked what it would feel like to be at the top of their game, participants unanimously felt that they couldn't answer that question because they had never been at the top their game. They did admit that the feelings would be positive. When asked what stops them from being at the top of their game, participants listed: stress; lack of education; making bad decisions, and not having a plan with goals. One participant mentioned the benefit of mentors to overcome challenges, *"That's where mentors come back to play...if you have somebody else to talk to and they'll motivate you to move forward than you'll just get out of that [negative] state of mind."* (01:45:51)

Competition/Winning/Skills and Creative Talents

This section aims to understand how BMOC define and how they value competition. We also asked them to discuss their opportunities to pursue the American Dream, relative to mainstream populations. They talked about their personal talents and abilities and how those helped them compete in life.

Life as a Competition

When asked what competition meant to them, participants stated that it meant competing against others for something. A participant explained, *"Competition to me is when there's two people who are successful and there's only one job opening, the competition is on....so you got to work your magic and do what you do to prove that*

you're better than that other person." (01:48:55) Participants also described competition as being the best possible and continuous life improvement.

When asked if life was a competition, majority of the participants agreed. One stated, *"It's a competition all the way, it's a competition to graduate high school. It's a competition to go to college and study what you want then hope to get the job of what you want."* (01:49:53) Another participant countered saying that life was less of a competition and more of a test. *"I think life's more of a test, because at the end of the day if you're living, what are you competing for? You really have to ask yourself if you can do better and do the best to your ability."* (01:50:21)

Reaction to Moderator's Statement of the "American Promise"

The moderator read the following statement: If you do certain things in life, if you work hard, if you develop a skill, if you do the right thing, then you get what?

Participants completed the statement with "happiness" and "success;" however, they added that was not guaranteed. One participant gave a life example, *"[Robin Williams was a] phenomenal actor, you know? He had money but at the end of the day he's still struggling with depression."* (01:53:01) Participants felt that being dedicated to personal goals, reading and hard work were more important to achieving success.

The Creative Talents of BMOC

Participants were asked what being creative and talented meant to them. Participants described being creative and talented as: *"being good at something;" "being better than the average person at a skill;" "thinking outside the box"* and *"developing a skill."* It was added that creativity was a beneficial life skill, one participant expressed that, *"Just life in general, the way you dress, the way you decorate your house, the people you hang around with can be creative. You don't always have to hang around with a certain type of people, it can be diversity. That's being creative."* (02:08:30)

One participant described the difference between creativity and talent, *"Being creative is different than being talented I think because creative means that your mind works better to come up with ideas and talented means you can execute those ideas in a good and professional way."* (02:05:21) In general, participants felt that Latino youth could excel at anything, but that stereotypically they excelled at sports (such as soccer and baseball), cooking, and drinking. One participant clarified, *"Anything you really apply yourself to...just 'cause your Latino doesn't mean you're really good at soccer."* (02:06:42)

Resources for Enhancing Creative Talents and Skills

Participants were asked what resources they used to enhance their creative talents and skills. Participants mentioned that having a mentor, as well paying attention to one's own passion could enhance creative talents and skills. One participant stated, *"I think if you're passionate about it it'll come to you randomly."* (01:13:55) Another added, *"If you talk to someone who's already good at what you're trying to be good at and you get advice and tips from them. And practice because practice makes perfect...you'll eventually get the hang of it and you'll get good at it."* (02:14:26) Participants said they weren't aware of any resources that were specifically for Latino men.

Existing Online/Offline Resources for BMOC

In this section BMOC discussed the quantity and quality of resources available to them, both via online/digital tools and in their respective home communities. We also explored whether these resources were helpful in the process of achieving their goals.

Online Resources

When asked for online resources that help them achieve success, responses included: YouTube and Google. A participant described how YouTube could help one achieve success, *"If you're a soccer player, just go to YouTube and they'll show you how to do it, maybe techniques that you're not using, and you can adapt that technique and put your own player."* (02:15:30)

Type of Mobile App BMOC Wish They Could Have to Help be Successful

When asked what type of mobile app they wished they could have for helping them be successful, one participant described an app that would make people aware of things going on in the community. He explained, *"A community blog. Say if there was a charity event, or if there was going to be something here, you could put it on the blog...Or if someone's going to have an event, they could post that they need people to help our community, so be here at this time."* (02:20:00)

Another participant desired an app that would provide employment resources. He stated, *"An app that would list like job listings, or job fairs, just opportunities like that. There's basically nothing that's like 'hey, you should apply here, no experience no GED needed.' Just something that would alert you. Something that would basically help you with a job."* (02:20:40)

Offline Resources

When asked for resources in their community that help them enhance or develop their skills, responses included: mentors; family support; church services, and community organizations. All the participants acknowledged that the organization that hosted the focus group, Centro CHA, was an organization committed to helping the community and described it as a *"specific gateway that can help you with job searches."*

APPENDIX C: ANALYSIS OF THE PRE-FOCUS GROUP SURVEYS

Analysis of the Pre-Focus Group Surveys African-American and Latino Focus Groups

The findings in this report attachment are based on the pre-focus group survey that was administered to the African-American and Latino males that participated in the qualitative research that took place in Oakland, Los Angeles, Long Beach, New York City, Baltimore, Atlanta, New Orleans and Detroit between February and May 2015. The quantitative data contained in this report provides a demographic and psychographic profile of the young men that participated in the focus groups.

Demographics

Age

The sample was comprised of African-American males (79%) from Oakland, New York City, Baltimore, Atlanta, New Orleans and Detroit and Latino males (21%) from Los Angeles and Long Beach. 64% of the males were between the ages of 18 and 21.

9	18 years-old	5	20 years-old	5	22 years-old	9	24 years-old
7	19 years-old	7	21 years-old	2	23 years-old		

Sexual Orientation

When asked to define their sexual orientation, 93% of the males stated they were “heterosexuals,” while 7% identified with being “gay.”

41	Heterosexual (Straight)	3	Gay	()	Transgender	()	Asexual
()	Lesbian	()	Bi-Sexual	()	Questioning	()	Other_____

Education

59% of the males were currently enrolled in high school, vocational/technical school, trade school or college, while 16% were planning on enrolling and 25% were not currently enrolled in school.

When asked the last level of school completed, 48% of the males had completed no more than 12th grade, while 41% had completed some college.

()	9 th Grade or Less	15	12 th Grade	8	Some College
1	10 th Grade	3	GED	2	2-Year College
5	11 th Grade	2	Vocational/Training/Trade School	8	4-Year College

91% of the males were either planning to or were continuing their education after high school, while 9% stated that they would like to, but their family/financial situation didn't allow it.

Employment

61% of the males were employed full-time, part-time, self-employed or seasonally, while 23% were unemployed. Another 16% claimed to make money through other means.

5	Full-Time	1	Seasonal (Summer, Holidays, etc.)	2	I Don't Have a Real Job, I Get Paid Under The Table (Cash)
18	Part-Time	()	Day Laborer	()	I Don't Have a Real Job, I Hustle/Sell Things
3	Self-Employed	10	I Don't Have a Job	5	I Don't Have a Real Job, I Do Odd Jobs/Errands/Babysitting

Finances

Only 14% of the males did not have some type of bill, account or card in their name. Bank accounts and credit/debit cards were the most common for these males with 52% having a checking account, 50% having a debit card, 41% having a savings account and 27% having a credit card. Beyond financial accounts, 41% had cell phone bills in their name while 34% had both Netflix accounts and an iTunes account.

18	Savings Account	1	Secure Credit Card	18	Cell Phone Bills	15	iTunes
23	Checking Account	22	Debit Card	2	Home Phone Bills	10	Gaming Rewards Card
12	Credit Card	7	Utility Bills (gas, electric, water)	15	Netflix	6	None of These

Exposure to Drugs, Violence and the Criminal Justice System

Personal Drug Use

When asked if they had used any drugs at least three times in the last month, 41% of the males stated that they didn't use drugs, including smoking tobacco. For those that had used drugs at least three times in the last month, "alcohol" was cited as the most popular (41%), followed by "marijuana" (39%) and "cigarettes/tobacco" (23%).

10	Cigarettes/Tobacco	()	Heroin	()	PCP
18	Alcohol	()	Prescription Pain Killer (Oxycontin, Vicodin, etc.)	1	Ecstasy
17	Marijuana	()	Ritalin	()	LSD
1	Cocaine/Crack	1	Molly (Designer Drug)	1	Psilocybin Mushrooms
1	Meth	()	Bath Salts	18	I Haven't Used Any of These

Victims of Violence

When asked whether they had been victims of any acts of violence, only 20% of the males stated that they had not. Over half (57%) of the males had been a victim of "fist fighting/assault," while 25% had been a victim of a "robbery" and 23% each had been a victim of a "hate crime" or "incident with a gun." Two out of 10 males (20%) had been victim to some type of "bullying."

25	Fist Fighting/Assault	2	Intimate/Dating Violence	2	Chronic Bullying Online/Social Media
10	Incident with a Gun	5	Chronic Bullying at School	2	Chronic Intimidation/Bullying in Neighborhood
()	Sexual Assault	1	Child Abuse (In The House)	9	Never Been a Victim of These Acts
11	Robbery	10	Hate Crime		

Involvement with Criminal Justice System

When given a series of possible involvements with the criminal justice system, only 16% stated that they had "never been involved." For those that had been involved with the criminal justice system, the most common way was being "stopped and frisked by police" (57%), followed by 39% that were "arrested and went to court" and 34% that were "arrested."

7	Never Been Involved	3	Testified in Court (As Witness)	17	Arrested and Went to Court
10	Never Been Arrested	25	Stopped & Frisked by Police	6	Arrested and Convicted
2	Never Been Stopped By Police	15	Arrested		

Worldview and Belief System

Religious Identification

When asked how they identify themselves, 41% of the males described themselves as “religious,” while 23% identified themselves as “spiritual” and 20% stated that they “just believe in a higher power.”

18	Religious	10	Spiritual	9	Just Believe in a Higher Power	7	None of These
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Nearly 6 out of 10 (59%) of the males “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement that “It is important to believe in God or a higher power,” while 32% considered their position “neutral” and 9% “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed.”

Importance of Education

These males were consistent in their feelings that education was important. When presented with the statement “It’s important to finish high school and/or get a GED,” 93% “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with that statement.

37	4	3	()	()
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

As a follow-up, the males were asked their feelings on the statement, “It’s important to go to college (get an education beyond high school),” to which 79% “strongly agreed” or “agreed.”

22	13	9	()	()
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Importance of Voting

Only 39% of the males had voted in the most recent local election, while 11% were not old enough to vote at the time of the election. More than a quarter of the males did not vote, with 14% claiming to be registered, but choosing not to vote and another 36% just stating that they “did not vote.”

17	I Voted	6	I’m Registered but Didn’t Vote
16	I Did Not Vote	5	I Am Not or Was Not Old Enough To Vote at That Time

Interestingly, when presented with the statement “I think that voting in political elections is important,” 57% “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with that statement, while only 20% “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed.”

13	12	10	1	8
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Most Important Things

When asked to choose three things that are most important to them from a provided list, 66% said “providing for my family,” while “giving to others” (59%), “doing well in school” (52%), “being considered smart” (36%) and “being considered original” (27%) were the next most popular responses. This is a myth-buster that millennial African American and Latino males only care about themselves and don’t value education.

26	Giving to Others	2	Following New Trends	6	Being Considered Funny
12	Being Considered Original	16	Being Considered Smart	1	Being Considered an Outcast
1	Being Considered Popular	2	Being Considered Stylish	29	Providing for My Family
6	Setting New Trends	3	Being Considered Tough	23	Doing Well in School

Defining a Successful Life

When it came to listing three things that define a successful life, the males surveyed gave the highest percentages to employment and personal milestones. Over half (57%) defined a successful life as “having a career,” while 30% defined success as “owning your own business.” More than one out of three (36%) defined success as “taking care of their parents” and “getting happily married” (34%).

9	Graduate High School	8	Buy a Car	10	Able to Travel the World
12	Graduate College	6	Have Your Own Children	2	Become Famous
5	Get a Graduate Degree	25	Have a Career	10	Earn a Six Figure Salary
15	Get Happily Married	13	Own Your Own Business	16	Take Care of Your Parents
10	Buy a Home	3	Make More Money than Your Parents	10	Live to Old Age

Respect and Trust

When asked who they respect the most, family members garnered the most respect by these males with 77% stating their “parents or guardians,” and 23% saying “other family members.”

34	Parent or Guardian	4	Spiritual/Religious Leader	()	Lawyer
10	Other Family Member (Grandparent, etc.)	2	Mentor	1	Favorite Athlete
4	Boyfriend/Girlfriend	()	Old Head	()	Favorite Actor/Actress
4	Friends/Peers	1	Coach	()	Favorite Music Artist
1	Teacher or Guidance Counselor	()	Doctor or Nurse	()	Favorite Comedian

Family members also tended to be who these males trusted when they needed advice about important decisions in their life with 61% stating their “parents or guardians,” and 18% saying “other family members.” There were also 16% of the males that stated they sought out advice from either a “significant other” or “friends/peers.”

27	Parent or Guardian	3	Spiritual/Religious Leader	()	Lawyer
8	Other Family Member (Grandparent, etc.)	5	Mentor	()	Favorite Athlete
7	Boyfriend/Girlfriend	()	Old Head	()	Favorite Actor/Actress
7	Friends/Peers	1	Coach	()	Favorite Music Artist
3	Teacher or Guidance Counselor	()	Doctor or Nurse	()	Favorite Comedian

Although “mentors” were not mentioned by many males when it came to who they respect or who they trust with important decisions in their life; 95% of the males surveyed felt that it was important to have a mentor in their life. This could suggest that males either identified “mentors” within their family or peer structure or that they saw mentors as being beneficial for more educational or professional development.

Belief in Self

When asked if they believed that it is up to them to make things happen in their life, 97% of the males either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with that statement. An interesting question is how to interpret that answer. Does this mean that these males believe it is up to them because they don’t feel like they can count on the support of others to help them achieve. Or does it mean that they actually have a strong belief that they can control their destiny?

34	9	1	()	()
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Impact of Ethnicity on Opportunities in Life

The response was mixed regarding whether race/ethnicity limited one’s life opportunities. When asked if they believed their race/ethnicity limited the opportunities they had in life, 55% of youth surveyed either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with that statement, while 19% either “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed” and 26% were “neutral.”

7	16	11	4	4
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Media Portrayals of Males of Color

These males felt that the way they were portrayed in the media was not an accurate representation of who they truly were. When asked if they felt news images and portrayals of males of color are fair, objective and balanced, 64% either “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed,” while 27% considered their position “neutral.”

()	4	12	10	18
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Projected Life Expectancy

When asked to think about how long they see themselves living into the future, 87% of the males said “into old age” (past their 60’s) and 10% said “into my 50s or 60s.” It should be noted five participants left the answer to this question blank.

()	In My Teens	()	Into My 30s	4	Into My 50s or 60s
()	Into My 20s	1	Into My 40s	34	Into Old Age

Belief in Going to the Doctor

When asked if they felt going to the doctor for regular checkups is important, 93% of the males either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with that statement. This indicates that they know the importance of going to the doctor; however it is unknown if they follow-through on that notion.

22	17	3	()	()
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Perceptions of a Healthy Lifestyle

When asked whether they live a healthy lifestyle, only 57% of the males either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with that statement, while another 36% were “neutral.”

11	14	16	3	()
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Technology and The Internet

Types of Technology Owned

Cell phones/smart phones were the most popular form of technological device owned by the males surveyed, with 100% claiming to own one. Laptop computers (59%), video game consoles (57%) and music players (45%) were the next most popular devices, even given that laptops are more expensive than their desktop counterparts.

11	Desktop Computer	25	Video Game Console	13	Tablet (e.g., iPad, Kindle, etc.)
26	Laptop Computer	44	Cell Phone/Smart Phone	20	Music Player (e.g., iPod, etc.)

Mobile App Downloads

When asked how many times a month they download mobile apps on their phones or tablets, only 7% of the males said they “don’t download apps.” More than four times per month was the most common answer with 28% of males responding this way.

3	I Don’t Download Apps	11	2 Times	2	4 Times
8	1 Time	7	3 Times	12	More than 4 Times

When asked to list up to three of their favorite mobiles apps, the males most often mentioned: Instagram (55%); Facebook (27%); YouTube (16%); Twitter (14%); Snapchat (14%); Tumblr (7%); and Pandora, KIK and Live Mixtapes with (5%) each.

When asked to list up to three mobile apps they had purchased in the last two months, the males included the following: Uber, iTube, Need for Speed, Chase, Fandango, Virtual DJ Pro, Netflix, Rymezone, Flow Free, Php Mobile, Future Fighter, Roulette, Angry Birds, PicPlay Post, Worldstar Hip Hop, CamWow, Repost Whiz, Quest, World War Strategy.

Keeping in Touch with Friends

At 82%, texting is by far the most popular form of communication youth use to keep in contact with their friends, followed by talking on their cell/smart phone (70%), face-to-face (45%), Facebook (39%) and Instagram (25%).

4	Home Phone	17	Facebook	()	MySpace
31	Talking on Cell/Smart Phone	3	E-mail	20	Face-to-Face
36	Texting	2	Skype	11	Instagram
2	Twitter	3	Video Chat/Face Time	()	Other

Accessing the Internet

All but 2% of the males claimed to have access to the Internet. The most popular way these males access the Internet is through their cell/smart phone (71%).

7	Home Computer	2	School	()	Relative or Friend's House
2	Work Computer	2	Library	()	Internet Café or Mobile Hot Spot
35	Cell Phone/Smart Phone	()	Community Center	1	I Don't Have Access

Entertainment Subscriptions

Only 41% of the males claimed to subscribe to any entertainment, music or movie product or service that requires a person to pay an initial, one-time, monthly or yearly subscription fee.

18	Yes	26	No
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For those that had subscriptions, Netflix (72%), 17% each for Spotify and Hulu Plus, Pandora (11%) and Amazon Prime (5%) were the mentioned products.

Internet Usage

The surveyed males were heavy users of the Internet. When asked what they had used the Internet for in the last week, 93% stated "e-mail," 86% claimed "social networking," 84% stated "watching video," and 59% stated "download/listen to music."

41	E-mail	26	Download/Listen to Music	22	Look for Employment/Job Search
38	Social Networking	6	Pornography	24	General Information Search
37	Watch Video	18	School Work	()	I Have Not Used the Internet
23	Instant Messaging	8	Health/Medical Information	7	Connect with Family (Other Country)
20	Games	12	Post Videos	()	Other _____
2	Fantasy Sports	3	Dating		

When provided a list of Websites and asked to select the ones they had used in the last week, 86% of the males surveyed said YouTube and 77% each said Facebook and 73% said Instagram.

34	Facebook	12	Vine	5	LinkedIn	9	MySpace
19	Facebook Messaging	14	World Star Hip Hop	3	Hulu	()	Friendster
32	Instagram	12	Wikipedia	()	Blogster	()	Bebo
38	YouTube	26	Netflix	1	Flickr	()	Black Planet
14	Twitter	10	Tumblr	()	AOL	()	MiGente
21	Pandora	2	Pinterest	()	Pheed	2	Snag
19	Google+	4	Skype	()	Xanga	1	Snapchat

Desired Features in a New Website

When asked if they would be interested in access to a new Website that features music and entertainment, local events, hot comedians, tips on making money, real-world job opportunities, educational opportunities, strategies for developing your talents and skills, and important info on staying healthy and taking care of yourself, 95% of the males surveyed said they would be “very interested” or “somewhat interested.”

Skills-building opportunities (64%), summer job & internship opportunities and healthy living information (52% each), and college scholarship opportunities (50%) were four of the main reasons youth said they would regularly go to a new site.

9	Popular Comedians	23	Healthy Living Information	5	Tips on Getting Into the Entertainment Business
2	Popular Actors/Actresses	1	Re-Entry Advice for Ex-Offender	23	Summer Job & Internship Opportunities
13	Popular Music Artists	1	Health Services for Pregnancy or STDs	22	College Scholarship Opportunities
11	Popular Athletes	2	Help with Drug Problems	7	Local Sports Team Information
2	Photo Uploads	10	Help with Relationships	2	Local Party & Nightclub Announcements
16	Music Videos	12	Tips on Relieving Stress	28	Tips on Developing Your Talent and Skills
10	Movie Trailers	14	Job Training Assistance		

APPENDIX D: INFOGRAPHICS OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN PRE-FOCUS GROUP SURVEY RESULTS

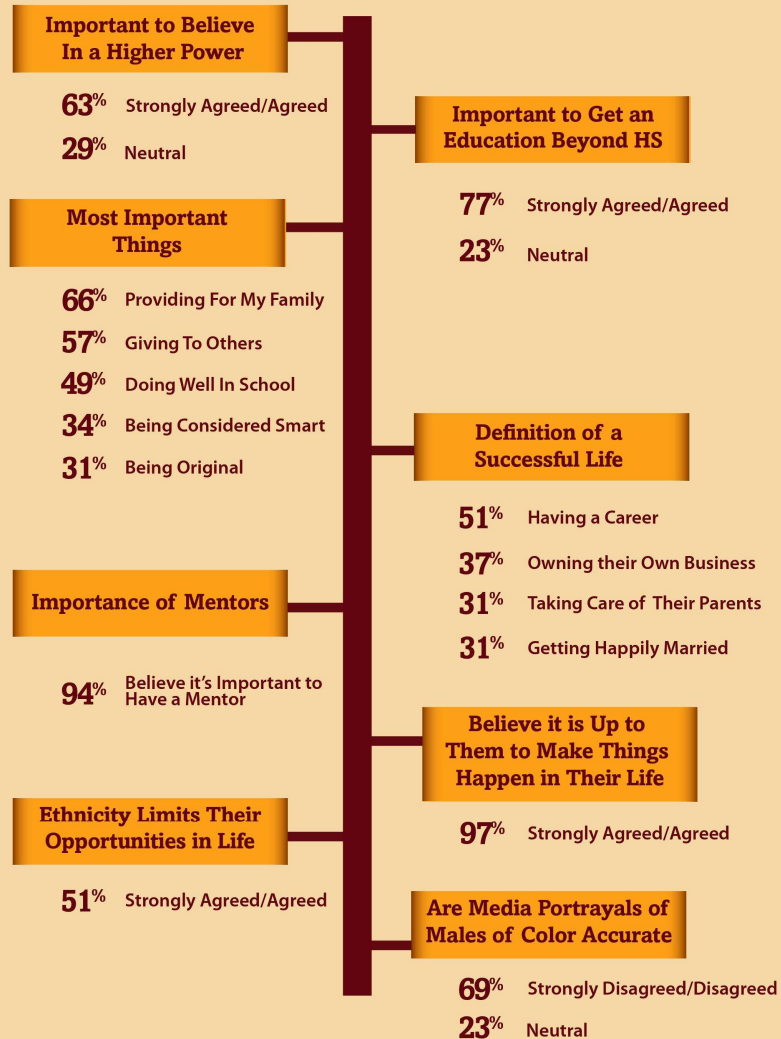


African-American Participants

WORLDVIEW

★ Understanding Boys and Men of Color in America ★

How BMOC See the World Around Them



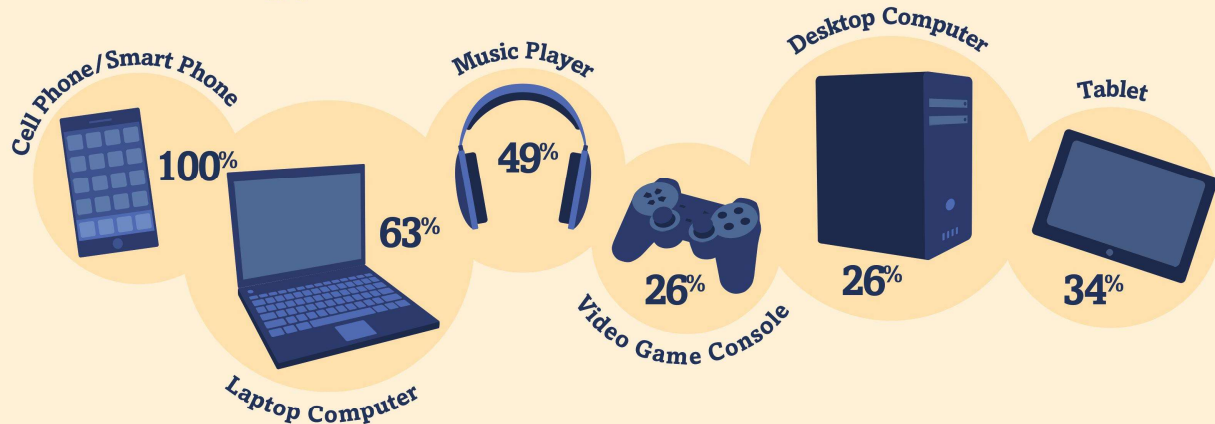
African-American Participants

INTERNET

★ ★ Understanding Boys and Men of Color in America ★ ★

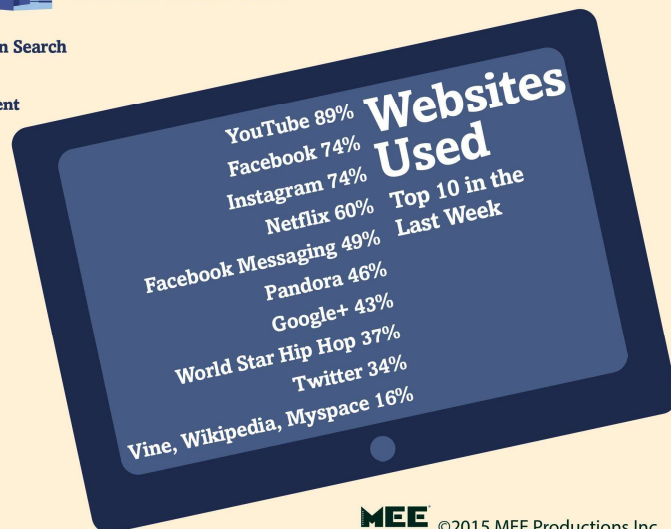
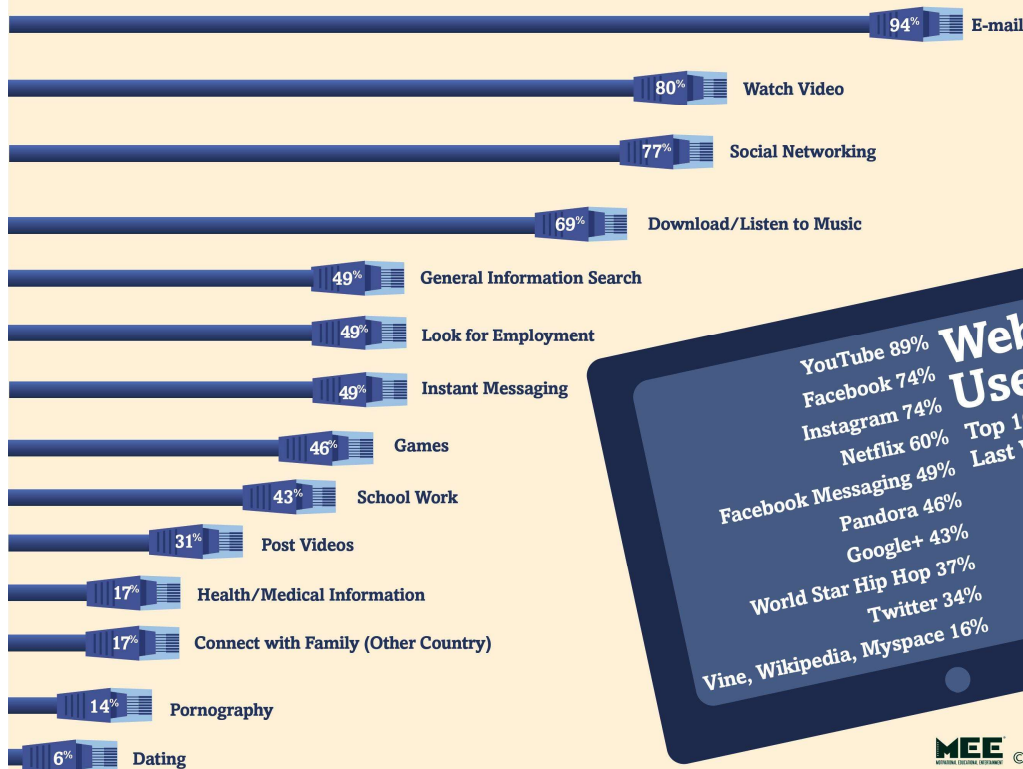
Technology Owned

Participants Chose
All Technology Owned



Internet Usage

in the Last Week



APPENDIX E: LINKS TO THE FOCUS GROUP VIDEO LIBRARY

LINKS TO THE FOCUS GROUP VIDEO LIBRARY

Focus Group and Associated Interviews	YouTube Links
African-American Groups	
Oakland #1	http://bit.ly/1WcJCLm
Oakland #2	http://bit.ly/1qEMQJS
New York City	http://bit.ly/1s4P1Yk
Baltimore	http://bit.ly/1OSGTEC
Atlanta	http://bit.ly/1WNbUwN
New Orleans	http://bit.ly/244s0R9
Detroit	http://bit.ly/1XN6qB5
Latino Groups	
Los Angeles	http://bit.ly/1TyJJgY
Long Beach	http://bit.ly/1TuyB2r

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THE CALIFORNIA ENDOWMENT

(<http://www.calendow.org/>)

Led by President and CEO, Robert K. Ross, MD, The California Endowment (TCE) is a private, California-focused health foundation that advocates for health and health equity, and raises awareness of how and where health can happen. Founded in 1996, TCE's mission is to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities and to promote fundamental improvements in the health of all Californians. The research team thanks Program Officer Albert Maldonado for his support.

THE CAMPAIGN FOR BLACK MALE ACHIEVEMENT

(<http://www.blackmaleachievement.org/>)

The Campaign for Black Male Achievement (CBMA) is a national membership network that seeks to ensure the growth, sustainability, and impact of leaders and organizations committed to improving the life outcomes of Black men and boys. The Open Society Foundations launched CBMA in 2008 to address the economic, political, social and educational exclusion of Black men and boys from the American mainstream. This project has received much-appreciated guidance from Rashid Shabazz and Sean Dove, founding leaders.

OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

(<https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/>)

The Open Society Foundations (OSF), formerly the Open Society Institute, work to build vibrant and tolerant societies whose governments are accountable and open to the participation of all people. OSF seeks to strengthen the rule of law; respect for human rights, minorities, and a diversity of opinions; democratically elected governments; and a civil society that helps keep government power in check.

MEE PRODUCTIONS

(<http://www.meeproductions.com/>)

Founded in 1990, MEE is a nationally-recognized public health communications, market research and social marketing firm that specializes in developing cost-effective, cutting-edge and culturally relevant messages for hard-to-reach, low-income and underserved audiences. MEE specializes in engaging the hardest-to-reach—those facing the highest social and health disparities—the most overlooked and underserved residents in a community, educating and empowering them so that they can be active players in developing solutions to the issues that are negatively impacting their families and futures.

RESEARCH PARTNERS

Focus Group Hosting Sites and Participant Recruiting Support

Men of Valor Academy (Oakland, CA)

Allen Temple Baptist Church (Oakland, CA)

Optimist Youth Homes (Los Angeles, CA)

Centro CHA Inc. (Long Beach, CA)

Madison Square Boys & Girls Club, Inc. (Bronx, NY)

Youth Advocates Programs, Inc. (Baltimore, MD)

Atlanta Technical College (Atlanta, GA)

New Orleans Adult Learning Center (New Orleans, CA)

The Mathis Community Center (Detroit, MI)



Heard, Not Judged

In the *Heard, Not Judged: Insights Into the Talents, Realities and Needs of Young Men of Color* report and video series, MEE adds the voices of 18 to 24 year-old men of African and Hispanic descent, from nine U.S. cities, to a dialogue about their place in the American Dream. These young men open up about their lives—the everyday challenges they face, who matters to them (and who doesn't) and who they can trust, their inherent skills and talents, along with the need for access to jobs, education, mentoring and holistic wellness.

To read the full report and view videos from the audience research, visit:

www.HeardNotJudged.com

